AN EXAMINATION OF THE TRANSITION OF MILITARY VETERANS TO COLLEGE

A Dissertation

by

DANNY RAY GALLANT

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Chair of Committee,	Vicente M. Lechuga
Committee Members,	Jean A. Madsen
	Elsa Gonzalez
	Richard Cummins
Head of Department,	Fredrick M. Nafuko

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the transition of U. S. military veterans to college using a qualitative case study methodology. To target a specific institutional culture, data were collected from student veterans on the campus of Stephen F. Austin State University. Twelve research participants were selected from a purposive sample and interviewed. Purposive sampling was further stratified to obtain research participants who represented a diverse veteran profile. Sampling criteria included branch of service, gender, race, military job, age, and duty assignment. In addition to personal interviews, two focus groups participated in the data collection process. Research data were analyzed using a qualitative thematic analysis and code development process.

The combination of the generous educational benefits of the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill and a burgeoning veteran population provide excellent opportunities for veterans to attend college and for higher education institutions to welcome them. The Post-9/11 G.I. Bill provides education benefits for United States military veterans who served after September 10, 2001 and meet certain qualifying criteria. With respect to the veteran population, a tremendous number of men and women have served in the United States military since September 10, 2001. Although U. S. military veterans have strong financial support with the Post-9/11 G.I. bill, those who transition from the military to college have concerns and needs. Using a case study approach, this study examines particular transition concerns and needs expressed by student veteran research participants.

The study's theoretical framework included adult-transition theory and multiple dimensions of identity theory as research components. In addition to a literature review of adult-transition theory and multiple dimensions of identity theory, literature was presented that examined military veterans' higher education transition concerns. The study's research participants noted a number of student veteran transition concerns that are similar to those presented in prior research. Two major findings in this study included the significance of research participants' military identity and importance of a formally organized veterans' resource center.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is first dedicated to my wife of forty years, Ethel Gail Gallant. We entered the dissertation journey as a team, as we have approached life throughout our marriage. I simply would not have been able to complete this process without her love, support, and encouragement. To physically assist in the transcription process, she was trained and approved through the Texas A&M University Institutional Review Board (IRB). She spent many long hours transcribing interview data. We share this completed work.

The second dedication is to my children, Sonya Gallant Stevenson and Logan Gallant. Your love and support helped sustain me during some difficult periods during the doctoral work. I also dedicate this study to my four grandchildren; Skylar Stevenson, Katy Gallant, Sarah Gallant, and Jackson Gallant. They helped select some pseudonyms for my research participants.

The third dedication is to my mother, Wilma Baker Gallant. Born in 1916 to sharecropper parents, she completed a bachelor's degree in 1940 and a master's degree at the University of Texas degree in 1953. She taught elementary education in Texas public schools for forty-seven years. She inspired my life-long learning commitment. I truly believe she has been able to observe my doctoral pursuit.

The last dedication is to the men and women who currently serve or have served in the United States military. Thank you for supporting the United States Constitution and for defending our American freedom and way of life. May God continue to bless the United States of America.

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The phrase …"standing on the shoulders of giants", attributed to Bernard of Chantres, Sir Isaac Newton and reflected within the Texas A&M University Library online research portal, is applicable to the completion of my doctorate at Texas A&M University. There have been a significant number of giants who contributed to and supported my doctoral endeavor. In addition to my dedication to her in the previous section, I again acknowledge the support and encouragement of my wife, Ethel Gail Gallant in my doctoral studies and in the completion of my dissertation.

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Trey's and I commuted to campus classes beginning in the Summer of 2010. We shared wonderful conversations about family, life, and work during our commutes. As a friend, Trey was there when I needed support. We were in one of Dr. Yvonna Lincoln's classes when I was informed by Texas A&M university police that my father had died. We were also driving back from class a year later when my wife called about my brother's death. Trey, I will always treasure your friendship and support.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, numerous wars, military conflicts, and regional disputes have occurred. As a consequence, military engagements have left military survivors with various types of transitional challenges. Many have adjusted to the loss of family members or friends in combat, while others have sustained debilitating injuries that required major life adjustments. Many have suffered emotionally and psychologically, while others have battled both physical and mental challenges. Regardless of the particular transitional challenges, some veterans have struggled with the transformation from soldier to civilian. Moreover, those transformative challenges are contained within different life contexts, transcending race, gender, and home region. Furthermore, transition challenges may result from visible and apparent war-related physical disabilities to internal and invisible wounds.

This study examines the transition of military veterans to college students. The introduction and background of Chapter I will be followed by the study's problem statement, purpose, significance, theoretical framework, methodology overview, limitations, and definitions. The background of Chapter I establishes a frame and tone for the study. Next, a life-course context presents perspective on events leading to the creation and assumption of a specific veteran identity dimension. The particular identity dimension, the focus of the study, is a U. S. military veteran who transitions from the military to college. Before the background of the study is presented, I will offer a personal perspective of a United States of America military veteran.

It is common for society to assign identifiers or labels to groups or sub-populations, and there has been a historical practice to assign veterans a social identity. The current veteran social identifier is hero, which, in my view, is how Americans should treat those who have taken an oath to defend the Constitution of the United States and have stood by that commitment. However, that appreciation for military veterans' service has not always existed. Veterans who served during the Vietnam era were not generally recognized as American defenders of freedom or heroes. Often, members of our society who had a personal or general disagreement with the war assigned negative and harsh labels to Vietnam veterans, targeting individuals who, for the most part, had simply honored their oath to defend the United States Constitution and serve their country.

On the other hand, group labeling or generalization may also occur within a positive context. A group may be socially embraced and generalizations attributed to all members, thereby blurring individual identities. My intention in this study is not to attach labels to veterans and cause them to be disregarded as individuals. As with most groups or sub-populations, veterans share collective experiences, cultures, and common group identities. However, each veteran must be regarded as a unique individual.

Therefore, in this study, I will identify concerns impacting veterans as individuals. To suggest all veterans are alike would not only be ridiculous, it would be a disservice since they have emerged from different paths to assume the veteran identity. Not all have the same experiences or the same needs. Failing to acknowledge the closely knit "family-hood" association, intra-reliance, and co-dependence of the veteran body

would be a disservice and, while this study may examine these servicemen in a collective context, I acknowledge they are a group of individuals who share similar life concerns within the veteran body as well as the broader civilian context.

Without question, some veterans gave all, some gave much more than others, and most fulfilled their responsibilities in an honorable manner. Honorable veteran service paid for and earned the benefits and support individually due to them. Therefore, when presenting veterans' health issues, injury issues, or other types of transitional concerns, I am talking about individuals' concerns which apply to a significant number of veterans. With regard to the transition from military to civilian life and college, particular issues address the veteran population, but the relevance is personal. As the study will reveal, a veteran identity is merely one dimension of a complex, comprehensive, human identity, and events contributing to the development of a twenty-first century veteran identity begin with the following background.

In recent history, the twentieth century, the United States engaged in two world wars, regional wars in Korea and Vietnam, and other military conflicts. Events occurred in the twenty-first century that led to significant U. S. military engagement. Shortly after the turn of the century and following a series of terrorist events, the United States engaged in major wars. Human conflict often begins in incremental stages or through events that result in significant military operations.

Events That Led to the Emergence of Twenty-First Century Military Veterans

On September 11, 2001, the United States suffered the worst terrorist attacks on American soil in U. S. history (Schlenger et al., 2002). The event first took place when American Airlines Flight 11 and United Airlines Flight 175 were highjacked and purposely crashed into the north and south towers of the World Trade Center (WTC) in Lower Manhattan, New York. Two thousand, three hundred and seventy-five people were killed in the WTC attack (CNN, 2015). In a similar but separate highjacking, American Airlines Flight 77 was crashed into the Pentagon, and one hundred and eighty-four people perished (CNN, 2015). Lastly, forty passengers and crew members died when a fourth plane was highjacked and crashed into a field in Pennsylvania (CNN, 2015).

The terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, impacted American citizens both psychologically and emotionally. Thousands witnessed the attacks and within thirty minutes, countless others in the country watched televised accounts of the events (Silver, Holman, McIntosh, Poulin, & Gil-Rivas, 2002). Following these attacks, the United States became embroiled in wars on terrorism in Iraq and Afghanistan, and from these wars, another generation of veterans emerged.

As a consequence of the Iraq (Operation Iraqi Freedom) (OIF) and Afghanistan (Operation Enduring Freedom) (OEF) wars, a large number of veterans have served in the United States military since September 11, 2001. Based on average monthly deployment figures, the number of troops in Afghanistan and Iraq increased from 5,200 in 2002 to a peak of 187,900 in 2008 (Belasco, 2009). As reflected in the deployment

figures, the U. S. military commitment in Iraq and Afghanistan has been substantial, and the total number of U. S. veterans who have served since September 11, 2011, is staggering. The American Council on Education (ACE, 2012) noted that over two million individuals have served in the United States military since September 11, 2001.

Military Veteran College Enrollment and the Post-9/11 G. I. Bill

Many of these twenty-first century veterans have enrolled in college. Of course, there is a history of college financial support for veterans, including programmatic support typically characterized as the G. I. Bill. The current version of the G. I. Bill is known as the Post-9/11 G. I. Bill (PGIB). On November 8, 2013, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced through a news release that one million veterans, service members and family members have utilized the PGIB since the program's August 2009 inception (United States Department of Veterans Affairs, 2013). In fiscal years 2009 through 2013, the numbers of PGIB beneficiaries were: 34,393; 365,640; 555,329; 646,302; and 754,229, respectively (United States Department of Veterans Affairs, VBA Annual Benefits Report, Education, 2013). PGIB payments to beneficiaries in fiscal year 2013 totaled $10,159,780,620 (United States Department of Veterans Affairs, 2013). The PGIB educational benefits and the extent of veteran participant level in the program underscore the importance of veteran enrollment in college. The following provides more detailed information about the PGIB.

The PGIB is statutorily described as the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008, 38 U.S.C., and is Title V of the Supplemental Appropriations

Act of 2008, H.R. 2462 (Post 9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008, 38 U.S.C. §3311, 2008). H.R. 2462 was passed by the United States Congress and signed into law on June 30, 2008, by President George W. Bush. The Post-9/11 G. I. Bill was implemented on August 1, 2009 (United States Department of Veterans Affairs, n.d.-b). The Post-9/11 G. I. Bill is available to all veterans who served on active duty in the military after September 10, 2001, and received an honorable discharge or continued on active duty (United States Department of Veterans Affairs, 2013). PGIB benefits include tuition and fees, monthly housing allowances, and books and supplies stipends. Eligible PGIB beneficiaries receive 36 months of full-time education benefits and have fifteen years from the date of the last discharge to use the benefits. Further, PGIB eligible veterans may transfer educational benefits to dependents if the transferee meets Department of Defense eligibility criteria (United States Department of Veterans Affairs, 2013). An examination of the history of the G. I. Bill provides perspective about the potential impact of the PGIB on military veterans' college enrollments.

History of the G. I. Bill

To consider the possible impact the PGIB could have on current and future college enrollment, the original G. I. Bill requires examination. Interestingly, review of the original G. I. Bill, known as the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of l944, has been described as one of the most successful public policies in United States history (Serow, 2004). Olson (1973) indicated that over time, 2,232,000 World War II veterans used the educational benefits of the G.I. Bill at a cost of $5.5 billion. Mettler (2002) indicated that

7.8 million or 51% of returning World War II veterans used the bill's educational benefits, and by l947, 49% of all U. S. college students were veterans.

Also noteworthy is the impact of the original G. I. Bill on veteran college enrollment, for Caspers and Ackerman (2013) contended that the PGIB has the most generous provisions of any education benefits package since World War II. Allison A. Hickey, Veterans Affairs Under Secretary for Benefits was quoted as saying, "For over 68 years, GI Bill programs have shaped and changed the lives of service members, veterans, their families and survivors by helping them reach their educational goals. Benefits provided under the Post-9/11 GI Bill will continue to shape and change the lives of veterans by helping them build a stronger foundation for their careers" (United States Department of Veterans Affairs News Release, 2012). Casper and Ackerman (2013) noted that the higher education benefits of the PGIB would enable a significant number of veterans to pursue higher education. A comparison of former veterans' educational benefits reveals some notable changes in the current G. I. Bill program. For example, the PGIB has a number of benefit provisions that differ significantly from the previous veterans' college assistance program known as the Montgomery G. I. Bill (MGIB). As of October 1, 2014, the MGIB paid $1,717 per month for full-time college students who had at least three years of active duty (United States Department of Veterans Affairs, n.d.-a, MGIB).

The PGIB pays the full cost of all tuition and fees for all public school in-state students. The current payment for those attending private or foreign institutions is capped at $20,235.02 for the academic year, August 1, 2014, through July 31, 2015,

(United States Department of Veterans Affairs, n.d.-b, PGIB). According to the VA, the MGIB has complex eligibility requirements, including numerous months of continuous active duty military service unless restrictive exceptions are met. The PGIB establishes at least partial availability for military veterans who had active duty service for 90 days. Full eligibility is available after three years of active duty service (Caspers & Ackerman, 2013). At the time of this study, the PGIB also offers a monthly housing allowance and pays up to $1,000 per year for books and supplies. Conversely, the MGIB allows no provision for housing or book expenses (United States Department of Veterans Affairs, n.d.-c).

Veterans' use of the PGIB indicates the program has a significant impact on college enrollment. At the time of this study, information released by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) reported that of the 1,000,000 veterans, service members, and family members who have participated in the PGIB, over $30 billion in program support has been provided (United States Department of Veterans Affairs, 2013). In a 2012 news release, the VA reported PGIB fiscal year 2011 program participation reflected an increase of 15 percent over 2010 and 71 percent over 2009(United States Department of Veterans Affairs News Release, 2012). Former Secretary of Veterans Affairs Erik K. Shenseki was quoted as saying, "this is one of the most important programs helping our Iraq and Afghanistan veterans reach their educational goals. We're proud this important benefit is making such a big difference in the lives of so many veterans"(United States Department of Veterans Affairs News Release, 2012). Thus, the significant number of veterans eligible for the PGIB provides an interesting research opportunity to examine

the process whereby veterans transition from military service members to college students. The examination of that process will be guided by a specific research problem that follows.

Problem Statement

In the previous section, I discussed the large number of college-eligible military veterans and the generous college assistance benefits offered by the PGIB. The intersection of financial assistance for veterans and a large potential student population suggest a great opportunity for both veterans and the higher education community. Although the combination of potential student veterans and current G. I. Bill federal financial aid could result in major enrollment gains for higher education, concerns exist for military veterans as a student population. Research suggests that veterans have transition issues that may affect college success. Combat veterans, in particular, have life experiences that may impact transition to college. In an examination of the effects of combat on individuals, Hoge (2010) likened the transition experiences of combat veterans to a move from a fourth-dimension world back to a three-dimensional one.

Using slightly different imagery, Bragin (2010) noted that combat veterans' lives are completely reshaped as a result of their military experience. This remolding can lead to challenges for service members. Hoge (2010) indicated that military service, in particular combat service, results in significant life transitions. For some veterans, transition issues may lead to inhibited social relationships with civilians. Moreover, some service members and veterans feel more at home in a combat environment (Hoge,

2010). However, regardless the type of military participation, veterans who were not directly involved in combat may have lingering memories and issues related to events that occurred during their military service.

Westwood, McClean, Cave, Borgen,and Slakov (2010) noted that although service members are not directly involved in combat, those deployed in a combat zone may experience civilian torture, civilian and child casualties, and involvement with human remains. Regardless the type of service, leaving the military, returning to civilian life, and entering college are also major life transitions for veterans (DiRamio, Ackerman, & Mitchell, 2008), and any one of these transitions may be characterized as an environmental transition. Grossbard, Widome, Lust, Simpson, Lostutter, and Saxon (2014) indicated that student veterans must learn to adjust from a structured military environment to a less structured higher education environment. The transition is further complicated by age differences and military experiences that separate student veterans from their traditional 18 to 24 year old student colleagues (Moon & Schma, 2011).

Arguably, individuals who enter college after military service experience a series of life transitions that may begin before college enrollment. Livingston and Bauman (2013) indicated many military service members encounter a series of lingering transitional challenges, beginning with enlistment and continuing through activation, deactivation, and discharge. The authors also indicated many adjustment concerns appear to be environmental. Transition issues may be exacerbated in the exchange of military structure for an unstructured college environment. Furthermore, veterans may have difficulty adjusting from a "life-or-death" combat zone to a college environment

where choices or decisions often have less significant consequences. For some veterans, family responsibilities and associated financial pressure create additional layers of stress unfamiliar to most traditional 18 to 24 year old, single, full-time college students. This study examines the issues veterans face as they transition from a military to a college environment. As subsequent chapters present, veterans who attend college after military service encounter various types of transitional challenges.

The problem statement of this study is characterized by the particular challenges or issues veterans confront in the transition process from the military to college. Issues developed during military service may also impact the veteran's transformation from military service member to college student. For example, some veterans have physical disabilities or challenges that occurred during military service. Others struggle with mental, emotional, or psychological concerns that continue when military service ends. As adults, some veterans contend with family responsibilities. Others struggle with financial concerns. Some look for the structure and camaraderie in civilian life they experienced in the military. Therefore, as veterans comprise a unique college student population, their life experiences provide an interesting research opportunity to examine the transition process from military service members to college students. Data collection for this study began with the following questions as a research foundation.

Research Questions

The various transition issues that student veterans experience lead to the study's research questions:

1. What type of transition issues significantly impact U. S. military veterans' transition to college?
2. What can be done to help student veterans feel a sense of belonging?
3. What can be done to help promote student veteran success in a public four-year university?
4. Based on the literature that examines 18-24 year old students' transition into college, how do college student veterans' transition issues differ from other college students?

The research questions presented help form the focus of the study, and the methodology described the research process used to gather data for the study. The following research purpose expands on the study's rationale.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the transition of United States military service members from military service to college. The study is designed as a case study and focuses specifically on the U. S. military veterans' college transition issues. The process whereby a military service member transitions into college student life is a significant aspect of the study. As a foundation for the research, the theoretical framework includes two research theories used to examine specific transition issues. The theoretical framework and study methodology will be presented in later sections. In the following, I provide the context of the study and its significance, which begin the development of the research framework.

Significance of the Study

As discussed in the chapter's beginning, over two million individuals have served in the military since September 11, 2001 (ACE, 2012). The number of veterans who have served in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars is significant for two particular reasons. First, two million veterans comprise a large group of individuals with different life experiences and concerns. Second, the substantial number of veterans has created an enormous pool of potential higher education students eligible for the PGIB, the current veterans' college assistance program. The evidence that the combination of eligible veterans and the PGIB will result in additional increases in veterans' college enrollment appears compelling. That evidence is reflected in veteran student college attendance, for higher education institutions have not experienced the recent growth in student veterans since World War II (ACE, 2012). Although the current G. I. Bill assists veterans with college costs, financial concerns are only one category of transition issues that may influence the veterans' shift to college. The veterans who entered college after military service have brought, and others continue to bring, a unique set of life and transition experiences. Two research theories, adult transition theory and multiple dimensions of identity theory, comprise the study's theoretical framework and are used as guides.

Theoretical Framework

This study uses two theoretical framework components. First, adult-transition theory, which was developed by Dr. Nancy Schlossberg and further explored in collaboration with other scholars. As the foundation for this component of the

framework, I will use Dr. Schlossberg's adult-transition theory research presented by Schlossberg (1984), Sargent and Schlossberg (1988), Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman, (1995), Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson (2006), and Anderson, Goodman and Schlossberg (2012). In Chapter II, I will provide an extensive review of adult-transition theory. The second component of the theoretical framework is multiple dimensions of identity theory. As the foundation for multiple dimensions of identity theory in this study, I will use research provided by Jones and McEwen (2000), McEwen (2003), and Abes, Jones, and McEwen (2007). As the second component of the theoretical framework, multiple dimensions of identity theory will be explored in Chapter II.

Methodology Overview

Case Study as the Research Methodology

The research design and methodology is a case study of United States military veterans who are college students at Stephen F. Austin State University, located in Nacogdoches, Texas. The selection of a case study methodology is based on the assertion by Lincoln and Guba (1985) who argued that the case study is the appropriate report process by naturalistic researchers. Further justification is provided by Creswell (2007), who indicated that a case study can be described as a "bounded system," which, as the author noted, can be a case that may include an event, program, activity, or individuals. As a specific event, this particular case study will examine transition issues of veterans who enter college after military service.

Case Setting

Using a description provided by Boyatzis (1998), the case setting will be categorized as an organizational setting, for the research location is Stephen F. Austin State University (SFA), in Nacogdoches, Texas. SFA is a public comprehensive university with an enrollment of approximately 13,000 students. The study participants (individuals) are military veterans enrolled at the university or those who have graduated from SFA since the Fall 2007 semester. SFA was chosen as a research site for a number of reasons.

First, SFA has a large number of student veterans. The university reported 978 veterans enrolled during the 2012-13 fiscal year (B. Williams, personal communication to Emily Hoffman of the Texas Legislative Budget Board, February 19, 2014). Second, the student veterans are active on the SFA campus and in the Nacogdoches, Texas, community. Student veteran campus engagement led to the establishment of a Veterans Resource Center (VRC), formally opened Spring 2012, within the university's student center. Finally, SFA student veterans participate in various regional fund-raising events to provide additional resources for the VRC. For example, the campus veterans' group also participates in a local golf tournament to raise awareness of SFA student veteran concerns.

Case Design

This study's design was guided and developed using the steps outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Those steps include establishing a focus for the inquiry,

matching the paradigm and study's focus, aligning the inquiry paradigm and supporting theory, determining data sources, determining inquiry phases, determining instrumentation, planning data collection, and planning data analysis. Research for the study relied on data collected through personal interviews and focus group sessions obtained from student veterans at Stephen F. Austin State University (SFA). The data collection efforts were guided by the study's theoretical framework, which serves as a research lens to guide and focus the study and includes adult-transition theory and multiple dimensions of identity theory. The following limitations offer perspective of the study's scope.

Study Limitations

As presented in Chapter I, the study is limited to student veterans who are currently enrolled at Stephen F. Austin State University (SFA), or have graduated from the university since 2007. Also, as discussed, SFA was selected not only for its strong veteran presence on campus, but its active campus and community support for veteran students. Although the study is limited to one university, the diverse group of veterans offered compelling perspectives about student veterans and transition concerns.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Many twenty-first century events that have taken place have underscored uncertainty and change for United States citizens. The United States of America sustained a terrorist attack on American soil and entered into prolonged wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. In addition, former Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernake was quoted as saying "September and October 2008 was the worst financial crisis in global history, including the Great Depression" (Egan, 2014). As a singular event, each is monumental in scope, complexity and consequence. Taken together, however, these three occurrences within the same decade caused tremendous uncertainty and change. It is within this first decade of the twenty-first century and its uncertainty, that many service members were released from the military and re-entered civilian life. A large number of those entered college.

Veterans who leave the military and return to civilian life face not only the effects of the twenty-first societal changes previously discussed, but also adult issues and life course trajectory changes and uncertainty that follow such major decisions. Those changes may occur in the form of specific or unique challenges, or may be blended within the overall dynamics of life itself. In addition to those expansive, active influences, military veterans contend with specific transitional challenges in the transformation from military service member to civilian. In this chapter, I will present literature examining the impact of certain transitional issues that may occur in the veteran's crossover from military service to civilian life and into college. Therefore, to

guide the study to a specific examination of veterans' transition to college, I will first explore the concept of transition, adult transition, identity, issues that result from transition, and transition issues that are unique to or highly concentrated in military veterans. From the broad context considering transition as a developmental and continued process, I will present and discuss literature that inspects sub-categories of transition that impact a veteran's movement to civilian life, and ultimately, college. To establish the progressive exploration of veterans' transition to college, I begin the literature review with a comprehensive presentation of this study's theoretical framework components of adult-transition theory and multiple dimension of identity theory.

Theoretical Framework

In Chapter I, I introduced the concept of student veteran college transition. Transition, as it relates to student veterans, can be a complex multi-dimensional life event. To provide research focus and context for the study of veterans' transition from military service to higher education, a theoretical framework has been selected that includes two research theories. The first is adult-transition theory and the second is multiple dimensions of identity theory.

Adult-transition Theory

An examination of adult-transition theory begins with a discussion of transition, a term used by various authors to describe a process of change, transformation, or

sometimes crisis (Schlossberg, 1984). Schlossberg (1984) argued that transition includes all three and can generally be described as an event or nonevent that changes roles, routines, and relationships within a context of person's work, family, health, or financial situation. Anderson, Goodman, and Schlossberg (2012) noted that transitions can be expected and scheduled or unpredictable unscheduled events. From a pragmatic perspective, Goodman, Waters, and Anderson (2006) described transition as a necessary component of human development. From a development perspective, adults in transition must work through a change process that may include a sense of loss and confusion (Goodman, Waters, and Anderson, 2006). The complex process surrounding transition is discussed further.

As a concept, transition can be viewed and addressed in different ways. Schlossberg (1984) suggested a transition should be examined with respect to its type, context, and impact. Anderson, Goodman, and Schlossberg (2012) described a transition as a turning point between two stable periods. Arguably, a transition process may reflect the way an individual evaluates and reacts to an event or situation over time Schlossberg (1984). As a psychological strategy, Schlossberg (1984) suggested the process a person uses to cope with a particular transition may help determine the emotional balance used to address life changes. Goodman et al. (2006) argued that the transition process is a time of opportunity that can be resolved positively or negatively. Arguably, each stage also contains a process.

Transitions can be further described as events or non-events that typically take place during an adjustment period. The adjustment suggests change, and the transition

process can be seen as a series of stages, with each stage related to the next for any necessary adjustments (Anderson, Goodman, and Schlossberg, 2012). Goodman et al. (2006) suggested that although the first stage of a transition may be connected to one specific event or non-event, a transition is indeed a process that occurs over a period of time. Moreover, the authors argued that transitions can have a physical, mental, and emotional impact on individuals. Within the change process, Schlossberg (1984) indicated that adults in transition need help because changing circumstances often bewilder them. However, if adults are able to specifically identify a transition event clearly, they will be better able to comprehensively assess the issue, understand its significance, cope effectively, and manage the change (Schlossberg, 1984). The following section discusses the phases or stages in a transition process.

Phases of a transition process. Bridges (2004) indicated that a transition process consists of three phases, including endings, neutral zones, and beginnings; however, an ending is actually the beginning or first phase of a transition. Goodman et al. (2006) indicated that an ending may cause disassociation, identity change, malaise, and disorientation. Furthermore, when people separate from their old roles and routines, disassociation or disengagement may occur. The second adult transition phase Bridges (2004) discussed could be described as a period of emptiness, a neutral zone, which occurs during a period of time when an individual could be suspended between his or her old and new identities. Goodman et al. (2006) indicated that as a result of changing roles, routines, and relationships, this period of time could be very confusing. Bridges (2004) also suggested the third phase, as a beginning, represented a sense of renewal,

which could result from the exit of the neutral zone where a sense of emptiness existed. The renewal could also come as the result of a career change or other major life event. From a positive standpoint, transition phases may provide opportunities for creativity, growth, and renewal (Goodman et al., 2006).

Schlossberg, Lynch, and Chickering (1989) offered a transition perspective of those who returned to higher education as adults. The authors described the process as three phases; *moving into* the higher education learning environment, *moving through* that environment, and *moving on*. The authors noted that adults who return to higher education alter their roles, relationships, and practices. The "moving" stages presented by Schlossberg, Lynch, and Chickering (1989) offer a different perspective about the incremental endings, neutral zones, and beginnings described by Bridges (2004). The process model proposed by Schlossberg et al. (1989) suggested the first stage in any transition is *moving in*. The authors contended that those who begin a transition will encounter a disruption period whereby old roles, relationships, and perspectives change and new ones develop. An additional argument was made by Schlossberg et al. (1989) that the *moving in* phase requires people entering a new system familiarize themselves with the expectations, rules, culture, and environment of that system. The passage through the *moving in* stage leads to the phase Schlossberg et al. (1989) described as the *moving through* process.

As part of the evolution of change, Schlossberg et al. (1989) contended the *moving through* process begins when those who are in transition learn to manage the guiding influences of the new system. The *moving through* stage may raise personal

identity questions. From an identity awareness perspective, Goodman et al. (2006) argued that a person moving through a transition requires the release of role defining criteria. Other considerations may also be necessary. For example, Schlossberg et al. (1989) also suggested that *moving through* long transitions may require support to work through the change process. Transition tension was noted by Schlossberg et al. (1989) who indicated that the level of impact a transition has on a person's life may determine the level of adjustment needed to integrate the change. The last phase in the Schlosberg et al. (1989) change model is the *moving on* stage.

The *moving on* process, which follows the *moving through* process, was described by Goodman et al. (2006) as the end of one series of transitions that leads to what comes next. This stage of the transition process can be somewhat bewildering. The *moving on* stage may lead to emotional disequilibrium when individuals leave familiar surroundings and experience the loss of previous friends, goals, and structure (Schlossberg et al., 1989). Furthermore, the *moving on* process can create social and emotional disruptions similar to the confused state, which may occur during the moving in process (Schlossberg et al., 1989).

With regard to a specific phase or the complete adjustment cycle, Goodman et al. (2006) suggested transitions are a natural part of human growth and development, and may present opportunities leading to psychological growth or decline. Psychological adjustments often rely on mental and emotional resources. Sargent and Schlossberg (1988) noted that individuals in a transition process bring a sum of assets and deficits to each transition. They also suggested that the examination of an individual's strengths

and weaknesses helps identify resources that may be used to successfully negotiate a transition or identify deficits that need to be strengthened. Sargent and Schlossberg (1988) outlined a transition assessment process that suggested adult readiness for change is based on a *four S* approach: situation, support, self, and strategy.

The Four S transition step process. The first step in the *four S* approach is an assessment of the particular transition situation an individual faces, whereby an individual analyzes the positive and negative aspects of the situation. A person may review the incident or event that caused the transition since additional examination of the situation often leads to a determination of whether the transition is voluntary or imposed (Sargent & Schlossberg, 1988). The second of the *four S* series is an analysis of self. In this particular assessment, an individual evaluates his or her personal strengths and weaknesses. Furthermore, an individual may review past experiences with respect to the type of transition presented. In this particular phase, Sargent and Schlossberg (1988) also indicated that a person may assess his or her emotional approach to the transition and develop options for managing the change.

The third S in the Sargent and Schlossberg (1988) transition assessment model represents support, and is used by those in transition to identify others who can provide or withhold support during the change management process. A person may consider family members, friends, or co-workers as possible supporters, and this evaluation of potential supporters offers the veteran opportunity to determine whether members of that group will provide or withhold support (Sargent and Schlossberg, 1988). Sargent and Schlossberg (1988) indicated the fourth S in the transition assessment model represents

strategies that can be engaged to cope with change. The authors described this as a method used to deploy strengths and skills to cope with a particular transition. Sargent and Schlossberg (1988) suggested that individuals use various strategies such as negotiation, assertion, situation manipulation, exercise, and meditation to help cope with change.

Additionally, Sargent and Schlossberg (1988) suggested the *four* S transition approach is a process adults use to evaluate their situation and develop themes during change that help engage them to learn and grow. Growth can be painful, but Schlossberg et al. (1989) indicated that if an individual feels in control during change, pain is easier to manage. A longitudinal study concluded that various groups' attitudes differ on life stresses, and life events have a significant influence on behavior (Schlossberg, 1984). Sargent and Schlossberg (1988) contended that the particular approach used in a transition process is important for change management, for adults are driven by a need to renew, belong, control, and manage life-changing events. Adult transition theory will be used as a research filter and guide to examine transition issues that impact college student veterans.

Adult-transition theory and veterans' college transition. I suggest the different facets of adult transition theory can be used to examine student veterans' adjustment issues. For example, the adult transition theory discussed by Schlossberg et al. (1989) as "Moving In, Moving Through, and Moving On," can be used to examine the impact of the change process occurring as veterans move into the military discharge process, through the completion of military requirements, and out of the set of

relationships that define military service members. A disruption period that Schlossberg et al. (1989) discussed in the moving in period can also occur with veterans as they move into deactivation, a process which creates a separation from structured and often close military relationships.

A transition from the military to the college environment may lead to a new series of moving in, moving through, and moving on phases. Arguably, the phases could overlap or reoccur. It should not be unrealistic to expect that the new college environment will require a moving in process that Schlossberg et al. (1989) described, whereby student veterans must familiarize themselves with the expectations, rules, and culture of a college environment. The moving in phase may be impacted by transition issues that occur in the moving on phase, for Goodman et al. (2006) indicated that an ending may cause disassociation, identity change, malaise, and disorientation.

Therefore, it appears possible that veterans may enter college with adjustment disequilibrium. As a component of change management, Sargent and Schlossberg (1988) argued that it is important for adults to maintain a sense of belonging in order to feel a part of the events occurring around them. However, the authors indicated that adults in transition often have the feeling of being on the outside rather than on the inside, which is the extreme opposite of belonging. Sargent and Schlossberg (1988) also suggested that this lack of belonging may increase the need for different types of help and support such as, campus support initiatives for veterans, which may help veterans obtain a greater sense of belonging on college campuses. To further explore the student veterans' transition process, the concept of multiple identities will be presented. As a second

component of the study's conceptual framework, I propose that multiple dimensions of identity theory can also offer insight into identity issues encountered by student veterans.

Multiple Dimensions of Identity Theory

The concept of identity. The assessment of multiple dimensions of identity theory will begin with an examination of human identity. Identity can be a complex concept. Researchers have used different approaches to examine and explain human identity. McEwen (2003) suggested that identity development is a complex process as one assumes personal and social identities. In a somewhat similar context, identity has been characterized as a continuous process that individuals may use to determine, assess, reassess, and reconfirm who they are in relation to others in their respective environments (Chatman, Eccles, & Malanchuk, 2005). Although McEwen (2003) suggested identity can be thought of as an overall sense of self, Lawler (2008) argued that it is not possible to offer a single comprehensive definition of identity and explain how it works. The author further contended that the concept of identity revolves around a paradoxical comparison of difference and sameness. For instance, gender may offer a particular common identity element while another form of identity such as ethnicity, offers human uniqueness or difference (Lawler, 2008). Obviously, different aspects of identity may overlap or share commonality. The author further suggested that people incorporate various forms of identity, which lead to the progression of identity to identification.

With respect to the progression of identity, McEwen (2003) noted that identity development occurs throughout life. In that progression, the assumption of identity incorporates prior identity development through one's life cycle. Identity accumulation creates foundational layers for continued identity development (McEwen, 2003). Moreover, McEwen (2003) indicated that interactions with family, friends, and other social connections through life are part of that progressive development.

The examination of identity is further explored by Berreby (2005), who described human beings as "human kinds" suggesting that human relationships are intertwined with different aspects of life. Berreby (2005) also contended that human kinds include types, cultures, and in-human kind family relationships that may include pets and nonliving important personal or family artifacts. Furthermore, the notion of human kinds incorporates an infinite amount of additional sub-categories that define and identify individuals (Berreby, 2005).

Ultimately, Berreby (2005) argued that identity becomes a personal characterization in one's mind. Similarly, Schlossberg et al. (1989) indicated that people have a need to develop and express a sense of their personal identity. However, that personal identity expression will be modified, for the authors also suggested that as life's developments occur, a person's sense of identity changes. Even though a personal expression of identity is established, identity remains complex, for no one has a single identity, as individuals must identify with more than one group (Lawler, 2008).

Group identification was characterized by Taylor (2002) as collective identity. Taylor (2002) contended that an individual's collective identity was the most important

aspect of the self-concept. A clearly articulated collective identity is used to establish a strong personal identity (Taylor, 2002). The author further argued that a personal identification process involves an individual comparison of one's own group to establish unique identity characteristics.

Moreover, Taylor (2002) argued that a personal identity cannot be formed without collective identity serving as a point of reference. Although collective identity may have a significant influence on individuals, some social confusion may exist regarding the need to integrate competing or cultural identities. In a broad social context, any disadvantaged group is challenged to integrate vague collective identities (Taylor, 2002). As discussed next, identity transformation often occurs in a transition process.

As part of identity transformation, Goodman et al. (2006) indicated that a transition requires the release of criteria that define a person in a particular role. The complexity of transition was noted by Spanard (1990), who indicated that adult college attendance may be a consequence of a separate transition or set of transitions in a person's individual circumstances. Moreover, Scheibe (1995) argued that identity transformation may involve role and values modification. For example, Schlossberg et al. (1989) argued that people who pursue additional education are individuals in transition, and in that process, can perceive a mismatch between their former identity and who they would like to be.

Further identity realignment was noted by Scheibe (1995), who suggested that identity transformation is guided by behavioral and social changes. From a positive standpoint, therefore, individuals may perceive education as an opportunity to discover

and mold a new identity (Goodman, et al., 2006). With the suggested research alignment between transition and identity, the second component of the theoretical framework that will be examined is multiple dimensions of identity theory. The theory will provide an additional research lens used to examine student veteran transition.

Multiple dimensions of identity theory models. Research presented by Jones and McEwen (2000) suggested that identity is more complex than a former or new identity. Reynolds and Pope (1991) contended that life's natural order does not establish identity categories; they are created to help explain multiple identities and realities. The authors discussed multiple identities in an examination of multiple oppressions. Reynolds and Pope (1991) developed a Multidimensional Identity Model as a way to resolve identity conflict. The model presents four identity resolution options: (Reynolds & Pope, 1991)

1. Identify with one aspect of self (Societal Assignment – Passive Acceptance)
2. Identify with one aspect of self (Conscious Identification)
3. Identify with multiple aspects of self in a segmented fashion
4. Identify with combined aspects of self (Identity Intersection)

Jones and McEwen (2000) explored a multiple dimensions of identity model that was conceptually designed to reflect a person's personal identity or basic sense of self. The model presented continuing identity construction and identity development influences. The multiple dimensions of identity model's core forms one's personal identity and includes personal values and characteristics (Jones and McEwen, 2000).

Research participants in the study described the model's core as an "inner identity" or "inside self" as opposed to an "outside identity" or "facts" of identity (Jones and McEwen, 2000).

The study found that the outside identities, created and named by others, were less important than the inside identities that were guarded and not easily influenced by externalities. Significant contextual influences in the model's development included race, culture, gender, family, education, relationships with others, and religion (Jones and McEwen, 2000). The researchers noted that significant identity dimensions and contextual influences such as gender, race, religion, and sexual orientation form intersecting circles that surround the individual's core identity. Not surprisingly, Jones and McEwen (2000) also found that a single identity dimension was too narrow, and identity could only be understood from a multi-dimensional perspective.

As the research has presented, identity is complex, and arguably, has multiple dimensions. Lawler (2008) indicated that different forms of identity interact and can be considered dynamic. Therefore, I submit that the multiple dimensions of identity theory may offer additional insight into the situation or life event that Schlossberg et al. (1989) discussed when the authors suggested that an identity crisis occurs when an individual experiences a major transition. Veterans' exposure to a wide range of significant life events suggests that previous assumptions of different roles may have resulted in the assumption of different identities. Those multiple identities will be examined as they relate to veterans' transition from military service to college.

Multiple dimensions of identity theory and veterans' college transition. One of the transition issues a student veteran may face is the personal determination or reaffirmation of his or her personal identity. No one has a single identity; multiple identities may compete, and in addition, may be categorized by what they are not (Lawler, 2008). The circular intersections of identity dimensions of self, described by Jones and McEwen (2000), may further integrate with the typical adult transition confusion that Schlossberg et al. (1989) described. Furthermore, identity overload can be disruptive (Taylor, 2002). For example, does a student veteran identity himself or herself as a liberator, patriot, and guardian of freedom? Does the student veteran carry guilt and identify as a victim? Regardless of life events that may require emotional reconciliation, identity is founded on a belief system that incorporates personal values and self-awareness (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). Moreover, identity conflict may not be driven by political or social values and may simply result from life experiences. Livingston and Bauman (2013) indicated that personal identity conflict may take place as student veterans leave structured military roles and move into an open, less structured college environment.

As a student, further identity disequilibrium may occur, for Branker (2009) suggested that a student veteran struggles with a philosophical imbalance as he or she trades ammunition for education. How does a disabled veteran add an additional identity that defines him or her as a nursing major? How does a student veteran reconcile former identities with additional identities as civilian and college transitions occur? The questions posed about the various student veterans' identity dimensions are obviously

simple examples. Different individuals may address different internal transition issues. As students, veteran identity conflict may be complicated by numerous social identities or roles, which may include identity labels such as veteran, disabled veteran, student, spouse, and parent.

Moreover, different social dimensions may contribute to identity confusion as student veterans attempt to manage and understand identity changes. Identity conflict may have begun and may carry over from military service. Research suggests the identity conflict that student veterans struggle with may begin with military service, for military culture deemphasizes individuality and emphasizes the group. The notion of veteran identity conflict was placed in an environmental context by DiRamio and Jarvis (2011) who indicated the military expectation is that an individual identity becomes subordinate to the identity of the group. Aggressiveness, rituals, and pride in belonging are all significant elements of the military collective identity (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). Toennies (1957) used a word called *Gemeinschaft* to describe a culture where belonging is all-encompassing. DiRamio and Jarvis (2011) contended the notion of *Gemeinschaft* remains in the consciousness of veterans and becomes part of their identity. Therefore, as veterans move into a higher education environment, the embedded need for belonging may remain as part of their collective identity.

From an identity conflict perspective, this study relied on multiple dimensions of identity theory to better understand identity complexity that may contribute to the preoccupation and confusion that Sargent and Schlossberg (1988) noted in individuals who are engaged in transition circumstances. In addition, I discussed that student veteran

transition issues may be influenced by the multiple identity roles or identities a student veteran has assumed or is expected to assume. Adult-transition theory and multiple dimensions of identity theory have been examined as theoretical framework components and have been linked to veterans' transition concerns. The theoretical framework will also guide the methodology and data analysis that will be presented in later chapters. Later sections in this chapter will discuss various types of transitional challenges faced by many veterans. With the underlying intent of the study to examine the transition of veterans to college, I will first discuss how student veterans can or could be impacted by collective veteran transitional issues.

Veteran Transition Background and Perspective

The adult-transition theory element of the theoretical framework presented by Bridges (as cited in Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson , 2006, p. 42) indicated that a transition process consists of three phases that include endings, neutral zones, and beginnings. Arguably, transition experiences or management might vary from one person to another. Moreover, one could argue that transitions have no clearly defined ending or beginning points for all members of a particular group. It could also be further argued that although experiences and events may act as guides or influencers, transition is a very individual, personal process. Consequently, since transitions may likely vary according to an individual's life situation(s), an observer may only predict the influence of transition on another person. As mentioned earlier, the study's intent is to examine the transition of veterans to college. That transition will be considered a process that may

include different steps, influences, and issues. In that regard, transition could include a period of time that begins during military service and continues through college enrollment. For example, a veteran's transition to college could begin or be influenced by service-related events and other occurrences that may take place during military service and continue through college attendance. The process will not have specified beginning or ending points. The study further takes the position that a veteran's college attendance is a sub-event within the broader context of the transition to civilian life. Therefore, it could be argued that student veteran transition issues should not be viewed independently of civilian life transition issues. Arguably, transition to college is part of the overall transition to civilian life, and veterans who attend college could have the same types of concerns as those who do not.

Therefore, the study will consider service-related events and experiences, concerns that many veterans encounter in the transition to civilian life, and issues that may continue or develop during college. In the examination of transition as a process, certain aspects will be explored to help understand what may impact a veteran's transition to and continuation in college. In that context, the examination process will consider steps or influencers that may play a role in transition. Therefore, the study will view military experiences, events, or concerns that have occurred or occur in the initial transition to civilian life as crucial elements or steps in the veteran college transition process. With the study's theoretical framework lens, I will examine various steps or influencers in a veteran's transition to college. Adult-transition theory and multiple dimensions of identity theory will help link student veterans' challenges to the broader

veteran population. A higher education awareness and sensitivity to those challenges can create opportunities for campus student veterans. From an adult perspective, a significant step in a veteran's transition to college is the initial transition to civilian life. In that step, various socialization aspects may be significant.

Veterans' Social Transition to Civilian Life

To probe the transition experiences of veterans who enter college after military service, I will begin with transition concerns that may first occur in the broader context of the transformation from military veteran to civilian. From that wider context, I will narrow the review to examine issues extending to the college transition process. In addition, I will discuss literature that assesses identity reconciliation or affirmation that may impact a veteran's college transition process. Although this study specifically focuses on the transition of veterans from the military to college, many life transitions are influenced by common elements such as uncertainty, unfamiliarity, and sometimes, confusion. Those instances and events come in many forms, but they affect all human beings in some way. In the following, I will examine some of the transition influencers that not only affect society in general, but also impact student veterans as well. As part of the life experience, individuals have many events in common that impact their lives. I will begin the discussion with life course influences that impact transition experiences of adults.

In twenty-first century society, a combination of culture, gender, and roles impacts adults' lives, as well as the timing of the various stages they pass through

(Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012). Specific adult transition experiences are many and varied. Those include, but are not limited to, relationship changes, marital change, and job changes (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012). In those and other changes, an adult's cultural boundaries also change, and as boundaries change, direction and purpose may also change. For military veterans who begin the transition from the military to college, the first step to civilian life can be a significant turning point.

In many ways, military service differs greatly from civilian life. Organizationally, the military is a highly-structured environment, and military assignments are directed by specific orders and assignments and typically result in geographic relocations. Furthermore, veterans often refer to military services members as family (Pranger, Murphy, & Thompson, 2009). The transition to civilian can bring loss of the "military family," loss of identity, and a re-adjustment period to a civilian environment. Another concern noted by Pranger, Murphy, and Johnson (2009) is there are no generally accepted beginnings and endings to the civilian life transition. Some service members plan early and others do not. In the civilian higher education environment, Rumann and Hamrick (2009) noted that student veterans often struggle with additional challenges in obtaining financial aid, advising, and counseling. In addition to the social and organizational changes that occur, veterans encounter a significant change in culture when they move from the military to civilian life.

Cultural Changes

The military is part of a unique culture. The transition from the military to civilian life can be a major cultural shift for veterans. U. S. military culture is a significant subset of American society that contains unique laws, traditions, values, and restrictions. Those elements interact to govern how military service members think and act. Part of military culture is the value system it contains. According to Coll, Weiss, and Yarvis (2011), core military values help define characteristics such as courage, honor, loyalty, and commitment. Military values are impressed on recruits when they enter the service, and regulate their lives while they are in the armed forces. Those values undergird military readiness. The pervasive influence of military standards of conduct is essential for service members to be prepared at all times for combat deployment (Coll, Weiss, and Yarvis, 2011).

As a result of its influential culture and structure, leaving the military is a major event for many veterans. Coll, Weiss, and Yarvis (2011) noted that some service members who leave the military struggle with confusion, status changes, and identity issues. The linkage of adult-transition theory to the examination of student veteran transition appears to be significant. Schlossberg et al. (1989) discussed an emotional disequilibrium stage whereby individuals leave familiar surroundings and experience the loss of previous friends, goals, and structure. Although military veterans have been well received and recognized as heroes by current American society, some veterans felt upon their return to civilian life they had no life direction or purpose (Bauman, 2009). Moreover, Bauman (2009) indicated some veterans expressed a sense of worthlessness.

Furthermore, in the transition from military to civilian life, some veterans struggle with a loss of their military family and identity (Pranger, Murphy, & Thompson, 2009). Ackerman, DiRamio and Mitchell (2009) noted that many veteran students also struggle with the change from a highly structured military environment to a loosely configured high education environment. Steele, Salcedo, and Coley (2010) suggested that veteran students were often frustrated by immaturity in traditional eighteen to twenty-four year old college students. Therefore, the cultural influence of the military is one of many factors that may impact a veteran's transformation to civilian life. In the context of this study, cultural changes may play a significant role in a veteran's transition to college.

In addition to what may be culture shock for some, other adjustments from military to civilian life are challenges for veterans. A study by Morin (2011), noted that veterans who indicated they experienced emotional trauma or those who had a major service-related injury were more likely to acknowledge civilian adjustment issues than those who did not experience such injuries. Moreover, the study found that combat zone service and personal awareness of someone who was killed or injured also contributed to civilian life transitional challenges (Morin, 2011). Pranger, Murphy, and Thompson (2009) noted that successful transitions to civilian life are particularly challenging for veterans who have physical or mental health concerns. Specific details about war deployment injuries and combat-related stress will be examined in greater depth in a later section since both injuries and stress may have a significant impact on many veterans' transition from military to civilian life. Within the overall transition to civilian life, student veterans may also struggle with military service-related injuries and stress.

As adults who may have numerous identity roles, veterans may struggle with service-related issues that impact their transition to college. These can lead to challenges that affect veterans' family relationships.

Family Relationships

Another transitional challenge from the military to civilian life involves veterans' family relationships. Those relationships may be impacted by certain post-deployment issues. A study conducted by Sayers, Farrow, Ross, and Oslin (2009) noted that 19.1% of Iraq veterans and 11.3% of Afghanistan veterans have mental health concerns. The authors further indicated that combat trauma has a significant impact on family relationships. Sayers et al. (2009) also pointed out that approximately fifty percent of married service members who returned from military deployment reported marital problems.

Particular issues related to conflict over the various spousal and parenting roles that a returning service member played in the family. Sayers et al. (2009) noted that over forty percent of the partnered veterans felt like a guest in their own home, and those who suffered from depression experienced this feeling more than those who did not suffer from depression (Sayers, Farrow, Ross, & Oslin, 2009). It can be argued that combat's influence can impact veterans' family relationships. As a part of the collective veteran population, student veterans who are married or have children may encounter various types of family relationship issues. Some women veterans are married or are single parents. With respect to women who had been deployed to combat zones, Baechtold &

De Sawal (2009) indicated that women veterans' college experiences would likely be influenced by the meaning they have attached to their combat experiences. Arguably, the sum of those experiences could influence women veterans' college transition experiences. The next section examines the psychological and emotional influence of combat on veterans.

The Psychological and Emotional Influences of Military Combat

Combat veterans, in particular, face transition challenges. MacLean (2010) noted that authors have discussed the physical and psychological horror of war for thousands of years. Moreover, combatants have always dealt with the realities that they may kill or be killed, be injured, or fellow service members may be injured or killed (MacLean, 2010). While human conflict in wars has led to changing battle environments as technology has changed, MacLean (2009) pointed out that current medical technology has also provided the opportunity for more injured soldiers to survive more than in past wars.

Kraus and Rattray (2013) indicated OIF and OEF veterans have experienced a higher disability or injury rate than earlier veteran generations. The authors reported the injury-to-casulty rate for Vietnam-era veterans was three-to-one, while the OIF and OEF casualty rate is sixteen-to-one. In addition, the number of amputations has exceeded those in the Vietnam War (Kraus and Rattray, 2013). As a result, many veterans live with both physical and emotional disability issues. Kraus and Rattray (2013) indicated that twenty-five percent of veterans who enter higher education will have some type of

disability. Steele, Salcedo, and Coley (2010) pointed out that some veteran students who have service-related disabilities seek support from campus disability services offices. For example, veteran students who had difficulties focusing in an classroom environment qualified for note-taking services or additional testing time (Steele, Salcedo, & Coley, 2010).

To highlight a distinctive reality of war, Bragin (2010) noted that combat veterans have witnessed and/or been involved in violent acts that non-combatants have only seen in movies or video games. Moreover, a combat arena exposes military service members to elevated levels of danger and disease. To underscore the psychological and emotional realities of war, MacLean (2010) indicated that combat troops are expected to violate social norms and experience a range of emotions, including fear, rage, misery, loneliness, and boredom. In addition to VA hospitals that provide mental health support, Steele, Salcedo, and Coley (2010) suggested that some college campuses offered free mental health services. However, the study noted that many veteran students were reluctant to use campus mental health services because of privacy concerns and the campus clinics' poor understanding of veterans' issues.

As discussed, combat exposure is a traumatic experience that the general citizenry cannot fully understand. The impact on veterans may be life-long. Elliott, Larsen, and Gonzalez (2011) noted that the physical, emotional and psychological challenges that military combat brings leads to one of the most stressful experiences an individual may face. For most of society, since there is no associated frame of reference, the lack of understanding sometimes results in civilian disavowal of combat experiences

and impact. Bragin (2010) indicated the lack of civilian acknowledgment of the extreme violence that occurs in combat, sometimes characterized as "knowing and not knowing," can be painful for combat veterans upon their return to civilian life. Thus, personal combat experiences should be managed differently. Additionally, the manner in which veterans later respond to their combat experiences may differ among various social groups. Ackerman, DiRamio, and Mitchell (2009) indicated that classroom focus was a challenge for some combat veterans. The study found that some research participants recommended a college orientation program for veterans.

The Influence of Combat on Veterans' Socialization

Combat experience may affect social groups in different ways. Veterans from socially disadvantaged families suffer more negative consequences from combat experiences. On the one hand, Maclean (2010) suggested that minority and economically disadvantaged veterans may be further deprived due to fewer available resources to address mental and physical combat issues. On the other hand, the author suggested that more privileged veterans can expect to rely on family resources to address their combat-related physical and mental concerns. Additionally, it can be challenging to target the reason why some veterans have combat-related issues and others do not.

To offer a historical context, MacLean (2010) noted that Vietnam combat veterans who had emotional problems before military service exhibited more anti-social behavior and stress. Additionally, the author indicated that economic class and minority status affected resolution of combat-related issues, and combat exposure could expand

the social inequality that existed before military service (MacLean, 2010). However, from a broad perspective, there are common emotional perspectives combat veterans must personally address.

Hoge (2010) argued the transition from combat veteran to civilian life requires a substantial amount of discipline to bridle the trained warrior response. Ackerman, DiRamio, and Mitchell (2008) found that many veterans often experience anger and resentment. Therefore, some coping challenges may result from societal ambivalence about the Iraq and Afghanistan wars (Elliott, Gonzalez, & Larsen, 2011). Bragin (2010) suggested a model that functions as an emotional bridge and supports veterans' changed consciousness might help them connect their pre-military, military experience, and post-military lives. Arguably, the psychological and emotional concerns veterans face cannot be separated from physical events that occurred during military service. Ackerman, DiRamio, and Mitchell (2009) offered examples of student veteran transitional challenges. One college professor referred to a veteran as an American terrorist. One student indicated he could not sit in a classroom for extended periods of time. Some veterans indicated they had been asked whether they had killed someone. It seems apparent that combat deployment can affect student veterans in many ways. The next section in the chapter discusses a medical condition that can affect troops in a combat deployment zone. The condition known as traumatic brain injury can lead to emotional, psychological, and physical concerns for some veterans.

Traumatic Brain Injury

Although the discussion of mild traumatic brain injury (TBI) is presented as a combat-induced medical concern for military veterans, it is essential to consider that many student veterans who were deployed in combat zones could have suffered from this injury. When the causes and effects of TBI are examined, the issues that can emerge from the condition appear significant. Arguably, the consequences of TBI could lead to significant transition and coping challenges for student veterans. Moreover, a campus awareness of TBI could help direct college campus support services for veterans who suffer from the condition. Concerns about the awareness of and treatment for TBI will be discussed later in this section.

As a specific health issue, a mild traumatic brain injury (TBI), also characterized as a concussion, describes a condition that relates to a blow or jolt to the head (Hoge, Goldberg, & Castro, 2009). The examination of TBI will consider short and long-term influences of the disorder, as well as its physical and psychological impacts. As a specific population, military veterans are exposed to various types of combat-related injuries that include head injuries that cause TBI. In a military environment, TBI often results from explosive blasts, and in those instances, TBI reflects a neuropsychiatric spectrum disorder that has a medical similarity with chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE). CTE is a progressive tau protein-linked neurodegenerative disease found in athletes who sustain repeated concussive injuries (Goldstein et al., 2012). Unfortunately, war leads to significant opportunities for TBI-related events.

In a combat environment, many weapons are designed to wound and kill. Described by Goldstein et al. (2012), an improvised explosive device (IED), creates explosive blasts that lead to death and injury. Additionally, Goldstein et al. (2012) noted that explosive blast exposure leads to an increased risk for TBI. Therefore, the Iraq and Afghanistan wars have focused additional attention of the serious and long-lasting effects of TBI. According to Hoge, Goldberg, and Castro (2009, p. 1,588), the Department of Defense (DOD) and the Veterans Administration (VA) adopted a clinical definition of "concussion/mild traumatic brain injury (TBI)" as "a blow or jolt to the head resulting in brief alteration in consciousness, loss of consciousness (lasting less than 30 minutes), or past-traumatic amnesia." In 2010, a study group described as the "Demographics and Clinical Assessment Working Group of the International and Interagency Initiative Common Data Elements for Research on Traumatic Brain Injury and Psychological Health" developed a definition of TBI as "an alteration in brain function, or other evidence of brain pathology, caused by an external force" (Menon, Schwab, Wright, & Maas, 2010). The diagnosis and treatment for TBI are complicated.

Peskind et al. (2011) suggested there is medical community disagreement whether mild TBI post-concussive symptoms reflect functional brain damage, comorbid depression, or PTSD. Moreover, Hoge et al. (2009) expressed concern that mild TBI, also known as concussion, may go untreated since the mild TBI definition adopted by the DOD and VA lacked specific criteria that included symptoms, time course, and impairment. Peskind et al. (2011) noted there was heated controversy with respect to treatment of continuing somatic, cognitive, and behavioral symptoms in military service

members and veterans who were exposed to explosive blasts. According to Hoge et al. (2009), the DOD/VA definition of TBI addresses the brain's physiological disruption only at the time an injury occurred. The complicated nature of TBI diagnosis and treatment can lead to transitional issues for veterans.

Hoge et al. (2009) described a process used to evaluate TBI in service members and veterans, noting that a post-deployment screening form is used to identity service members who sustained a TBI injury during active duty. The form asks current and former service members to recount whether they were dazed or confused at the time a blast or injury occurred. The authors suggested that the purpose of the screening is to identify and provide medical treatment for those with lasting TBI symptoms, which may include headache, sleep interruption, dizziness, fatigue, and inability to concentrate. However, there may be concerns with the TBI identification and treatment process. Hoge et al. (2009) indicated that a 2008 Institute of Medicine report commissioned by the VA determined that "mild TBI" was associated with post-concussive symptoms. Moreover, the report indicated that evidence was insufficient to confirm that mild TBI results in neurocognitive deficits or negatively impacts social and occupational behavior.

In the absence of a generally accepted medical definition for post-concussive symptoms, the VA established a disability category described as "residuals of TBI" (Hoge et al., 2009). The authors further noted that the VA assigns a 40% disability to those who have three or more symptoms that restrict function or reflect memory, concentration, or attention. The treatment for headaches, irritability, or sleep issues is not based on the current presence or lack of historical evidence of mild TBI (Hoge et al.,

2009). Moreover, the authors noted that treatment and rehabilitation that was designed for moderate and severe TBI has not been effective for mild TBI. Hoge et al. (2009) argued that disagreements regarding TBI continue.

Hoge et al. (2009) contended the disagreement about the underlying post-concussive symptoms and relationship to PTSD impacts treatment practices. Moreover, the attribution of post-concussive symptoms to either mild TBI or PTSD may lead to inappropriate treatments (Hoge et al., 2009). The authors also argued that inappropriate treatments may fail to address underlying issues such as depression, PTSD, or substance abuse. Hoge et al. (2009) expressed concern that continued and increased focus on illusive mild TBI could impede veterans' recovery. A diagnosis often associated with TBI is post-traumatic brain disorder (PTSD), and Andreasen (2011) indicated that even though TBI and PTSD are considered separate disorders, the boundary between them is blurred. The author noted that historically, PTSD has been considered to be resultant of psychological stress, and TBI was explained as a physical brain injury. In addition to the horrific physical and mental effects of TBI, there are long-lasting economic costs. According to Jaffee and Meyer (2009), a RAND Report and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimated that the economic impact of the combination of TBI and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) will total billions of dollars. In what follows, I will discuss PTSD and its implications for veterans' eventual transition to college.

Post-traumatic Stress Disorder

Definition of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder

Another health condition affecting many veterans is post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Some student veterans struggle with this condition. As the history and understanding of PTSD is presented in this section, I suggest the extreme consequential nature of PTSD can impact many aspects of our society. Arguably, PTSD is not only a serious medical and social concern for veterans who struggle with the diagnosis, but it can be a significant concern for higher education institutions that have student veteran populations. The complexity and potential consequences of PTSD that will be discussed could alert college campuses of the need to better understand and help student veterans address the condition. The examination of PTSD, its symptoms, and consequences are presented to suggest the challenges that may exist for student veterans.

To provide a context for PTSD, stress was described by Elliott, Gonzalez, and Larsen (2011), as a product of environmental demands that challenge an individual's coping capabilities. PTSD is classified as an anxiety disorder and may develop from an unexpected extreme traumatic stressor (Javidi & Yadollahie, 2012). Javidi and Yadollahie, (2012) indicated that PTSD may result from war events, sexual or other types of personal assault, kidnap, confinement, torture, severe car accidents, and natural disasters. The authors further noted that PTSD symptoms are closely linked to the particular traumatic event that trigged the disorder, and may disrupt routine life activities. Javidi and Yadollahie (2012) also noted that PTSD can be characterized by

duration. For example, if symptoms last three months or less, the disorder is described as acute, whereas if symptoms extend beyond three months, the condition is described as chronic PTSD. Moreover, a delayed onset of PTSD can occur up to six months after a traumatic event (Javidi & Yadollahie, 2012).

Historical Context and Development of the PTSD Diagnosis

As a uniquely identified disorder, PTSD is a specific diagnosis that psychiatrists developed as a result of the Vietnam War (Maclean, 2010). However, historical descriptions of physical and psychological behavior suggest a combat- related disorder has existed through many military conflicts and wars. For example, Nash, Silva, and Litz (2009) noted that during the American Civil War, soldiers who experienced combat stress were diagnosed as having "soldier's heart," "irritable heart," and "sunstroke," whereas during World War I, the characterization of "shell shock" was used to describe what was believed to be the brain's reaction to artillery blasts.

Andreason (2011) indicated that the relationship between physical and psychological stress was first discussed during World War I. The author noted that new combat techniques and threats such as stationary trench warfare, poison gas, machine gun fire, land mines, and mortars led to horrific casualties and injuries in an often tightly confined area. This new and brutal war-related set of exposure lead to the emergence of a syndrome that resulted in conditions such as confusion, memory, headaches, concentration issues, and noise sensitivity. As formerly noted by Nash et al. (2009), the

syndrome was characterized as “shell shock,” and the number of shell shock casualties grew at an alarming rate (Andreason, 2011).

As the war progressed, however, medical personnel noted that some service members who exhibited shell shock symptoms had no exposure to explosions. These observations led to the medical paradox of concussion-like symptoms without an associated head injury (Andreason, 2011). Nash et al. (2009) reported some psychiatrists and neurologists during the period maintained that distress following a traumatic stressor could only exist within an individual with a pre-existing personality weakness then characterized as hysteria. This conclusion relieved American, British, French, and German governments of responsibilities to provide disability pensions to soldiers who suffered from combat stress (Nash et al., 2009).

Andreason (2011) noted research and debate continued, for a distinction was also advanced by researchers during and after World War I who attributed shell shock symptoms to either a “neurasthenic/emotional” nervous condition or a physically based condition caused by an explosion or blast. Moreover, the author noted that continued research attempted to resolve whether psychosomatic or physical conditions reflected separate disorders or whether they were separated by specific boundaries (Andreason, 2011). As a result of competing neuropsychiatry explanations of biological or psychodynamic reasons for the development of the stress disorder, the debate continued since further symptomatic causes of the disorder had a major influence on policy decisions that related to disability determination and pension awards (Andreason, 2011).

This led to additional interest in the disorder's classification. After World War II ended, the Veterans' Administration wished to establish a standard nomenclature that would be used to characterize war-related psychopathology. The standardization would be used to diagnose the disorders and determine disabilities (Andreason, 2011). From that initiative, a diagnostic category described as Gross Stress Reaction (GSR) was developed, and included in the first *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-I)* that was published by the American Psychiatric Association in 1952 (Andreason, 2011). Andreason (2011) also indicated that the manual described the disorder as a reaction to a stressor that caused overpowering fear in a normal personality. Furthermore, it was argued that if symptoms continued, a different diagnosis should be established. Andreason (2011) contended that the definition of GSR had a major influence on the diagnosis of service-related disabilities in the Post-World War II period. The author pointed out that a second *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-II)* was published in 1968 and did not included GSR as a diagnostic disorder. However, the Vietnam War re-opened the discussion about the psychological impact of military combat.

During the l970s, a DSM III task force was organized to determine whether the GSR diagnosis should be included in the third edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. A number of Vietnam veterans demanded a diagnosis that recognized consequences of combat stress in order to establish disability and treatment benefits for combat stress disorder (Andreason, 2011). Dr. Nancy Andreason, who because of her psychiatric career and her experience in stress-induced neuropsychiatric,

was selected to participate in the research of combat stress psychiatric disorder. She contended there was a historically established syndrome that was characterized by cognitive and emotional symptoms occurring after exposure to extreme physical and emotional stress. Dr. Andreason argued that the scientific basis for the disorder was as valid as depression or schizophrenia diagnoses. She resisted the requests of Vietnam veterans' advocates who wanted to describe the disorder as "post-Vietnam-syndrome" and instead characterized the disorder as "Post-traumatic stress disorder" (Andreason, 2011). Nash, et al. (2009) noted that DSM-III described PTSD as the result of an event that would trigger distress symptoms in most people.

Andreason (2011) continued to suggest an often indiscrete, blurred relationship between PTSD and TBI. She argued that the disorders have symptomatic and biological overlapping features. Moreover, the author contended that the traditional polarity between physical or emotional causes for PTSD is outdated. Andreason (2011) strongly suggested that PTSD cannot be categorized as only psychological phenomenon or an excuse for certain types of social behavior. As formerly mentioned, the health and societal impact of PTSD affect not only the transition of military veterans to civilian life, but the transition to college as well. Francis and Kraus (2012) also indicated that PTSD symptoms can be intensified by student veterans' campus experiences.

Hoge (2010) noted that the agreement among mental health professionals indicated PTSD can result from different types of traumatic events leading to symptoms similar to severe stress. Few would likely challenge the position that military combat creates an environment in which PTSD can emerge. War zone deployment can be a form

of lengthy and severe stress, and it can impact the way the human body reacts to normal life stress (Hoge, 2010). A combat environment can produce extreme strain, resulting from physical deprivation or sudden traumatic events like unexpected attacks (Elliott, Gonzalez, & Larsen, 2011). Furthermore, the authors indicated that the literal threats to combatants' life often lead to damaged mental and physical health.

The Impact of PTSD

Factors that influence the prevalence of PTSD among veterans could lead to different types of transition issues for student veterans. As the effects of PTSD are expanded in this section, it is important to consider the student veterans on college campuses, and envision the challenges those students may have who struggle with PTSD and its symptoms. If left untreated, the potential impact of PTSD on an individual can be severe, prolonged, and dangerous. Many who suffer from PTSD self-medicate with alcohol or drugs, and social relationships are often impacted by the symptoms (Kraus & Rattray, 2013). The recent Iraq and Afghanistan wars, Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), respectively, have continued to highlight the impact of PTSD on combat veterans. Veterans who have PTSD experience physical, psychological, and social challenges.

Some veterans indicated they have anger and stress issues resulting from combat. Others discussed problems with their ability to focus (Ackerman, DiRamio, & Mitchel, 2009). Kraus and Rattray (2013) noted that student veterans list sleep disruption, bad dreams, insomnia, anxiety, depression, excessive anger, pain, flashbacks, focus

challenges, hypervigilance, and loneliness as combat-related issues. Research results from a study of returning OIF and OEF veterans from combat deployment indicated that 44% indicated symptoms of depression or posttraumatic stress (Lapierre, Schwegler, & LaBauve, 2007). A study reported by Seal, Bertenthal, Miner, Sen, and Marmar (2007) noted that nearly one third of OIF and OEF veterans were categorized with either mental health diagnoses and/or psychosocial issues.

Additionally, Seal et al. (2007) found that approximately 13% of OIF and OEF veterans experienced PTSD. Moreover, the Seal, et al. (2007) study indicated a statistically significant risk for PTSD diagnoses in veterans at younger ages, with the 18 to 24 year old group at the highest risk level. The authors noted that younger service members typically have lower rank and are likely more involved in combat more than older service members. Richardson, Frueh, and Acierno (2010) noted that there were higher rates of PTSD among enlisted service members, those who were younger, less educated, smoked and were problem drinkers. Research findings also indicated that roughly 80% of veterans who have PTSD battle severe depression, anxiety disorders, and substance abuse (Westwood, McClean, Cave, Borgen, & Slakov, 2010).

Widome, Kehl, Carlson, Laska, Gulden, and Lust (2011) found that veterans who had a recent PTSD diagnosis were more than three times likely to be involved in fights than those who had not been diagnosed with the disorder. An earlier study by Hoge, Castro, Messer, McGurk, Cotting, and Koffman (2004) found that 12 to 20 percent of troops who participated in the initial Iraqi invasion had severe cases of PTSD three months after they returned home. A later study concluded that approximately 15% of

veterans have PTSD and suggests the effects of the disorder link military service and certain types of health risk behavior (Widome et al., 2011) Additional research estimated that approximately 19% of combat veterans suffered traumatic brain injury (TBI), which can lead to PTSD (Elliott, Gonzalez, & Larsen, 2011). The research data on PTSD indicate the importance of campus awareness and support services for student veterans who suffer from the condition.

As indicated earlier, the effects of PTSD can have a significant impact on veterans and may be far-reaching. Church (2009) estimated that 70% of veterans will not seek treatment for mental health issues through the Veterans Administration. One of the biggest obstacles to early and effective treatment of military stress is the social stigma associated with the disorder. Nash et al. (2009) noted that military culture often has a low degree of tolerance for mental, moral, or physical weakness. Because they are concerned they will be labeled as weak or lose the confidence of their fellow service members, service members often avoid seeking treatment for mental health issues (Nash et al., 2009). However, veterans with PTSD will sometimes seek help through local clinics, and student veterans may use campus health centers (Church, 2009).

Societal PTSD Considerations

There are also major social challenges for veterans who have PTSD. Westwood et al. (2010) noted that veterans who suffer from PTSD are ten times more probable to be unemployed than other veterans, and they generally earn 22% less per hour than veterans who do not have the condition. Higher levels of marital issues, divorce, and

domestic violence follow veterans with PTSD (Westwood, et al., 2010). The authors further noted that veterans with PTSD are at a greater risk for premature death through accidents, major substance abuse, and suicide. Current research suggests student veterans on college campuses might have PTSD-related concerns that may not be apparent to faculty, student colleagues, or administrators. Moreover, sensitivity and awareness of the condition can guide campuses to assist student veterans who experience PTSD symptoms.

Bragin (2010) suggested that U. S. society is sympathetic to veteran PTSD and depression, but provides no general or collective transition ritual that would help bridge the combat and civilian environments. The author further indicated that the absence of a societal transition process causes veterans to construct mental barriers between their pre-combat civilian society, their combat environment, and the post-combat society to which they return. Bragin (2010) suggested that society's implied separation requirement may contribute to the PTSD and depression issues many veterans face.

Hoge et al. (2004) indicated that the psychosocial effects of military combat are not completely understood. As a way to address the often negative impact of military service, Doyle and Peterson (2005) suggested that programs to improve communication and help relieve stress are important for veteran reentry and reintegration into society. Doyle and Peterson (2005) also suggested family and social support were important for veterans in transition from the military to civilian life. In addition to the specific mental health issues and social transition issues that veterans face, student veterans contend with college-related transition challenges.

Female Military Service Members and PTSD

As a health issue, PTSD affects both male and female service members. Baechtold and De Sawal (2009) noted that approximately 11 percent of troops deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan were women. According to Bumiller and Shanker (2013) more than 280,000 women have served in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, 130 have died, and over 800 have been wounded as a result of their service. In addition, female veterans not only suffer from war-related PTSD, as do their male counterparts, but they are more likely to do so (Baechtold & De Sawal , 2009). According to Baechtold De Sawal (2009), in various support roles, women are often involved in combat situations.

Until former Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta lifted the ban on women serving as combat participants (Bumiller & Shanker, 2013), formal military policy has been that women do not engage in combat. However, the lines between combat and noncombat are often blurred in the current fighting (Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009). Unfortunately, the authors also noted that women were often not diagnosed with PTSD because of their cultural separation from combat. Furthermore, female veterans who suffer from PTSD may have a different set of transition issues as a result of the disorder (Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009).

In addition to combat-induced PTSD, women experience another serious type of PTSD that results from sexual trauma. Military sexual trauma (MST) is the phrase used to describe sexual harassment or assault that occurs during military service (Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009). Sexual trauma can be worse than combat-induced trauma and can lead to debilitating feelings of violation and betrayal (Hoge, 2010). Among veterans who

sought health care, the Department of Veterans Affairs acknowledged that 23 percent of the women reported sexual assault while in the military, and 55 percent reported sexual harassment (Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009). Baechtold and De Sawal (2009) suggested these incidents added to the combat-related stress affecting female veterans. Furthermore, the evidence strongly indicates that PTSD may have a significant impact on both male and female student veterans, and regardless of gender, PTSD may also have a significant impact on veterans' quality of life.

PTSD and Quality of Life

Schnurr, Lunney, Bovin, and Marx (2009) suggested a definition of quality of life as a physical, mental, and social well-being that includes social-material conditions, functioning, and satisfaction. Using the definitional criteria, Schnurr et al. (2009) explored veteran employment and concluded that PTSD is related to an increased risk of unemployment. In addition, it was found that PTSD is related to homelessness (Schnurr, Lunney, Bovin, & Marx, 2009). The authors also noted that certain studies indicated that the onset of PTSD took place before veterans first became homeless.

Another quality of life issue examined was social functioning. Schnurr et al. (2009) noted studies that reported OIF and OEF veterans who have PTSD are challenged in work functions more than those who do not suffer from PTSD. Work dysfunctions for those with PTSD included difficulty performing work, lower productivity, and more absenteeism than for those without PTSD (Shnurr, et al., 2009). As was referenced earlier by Ackerman, DiRamio, and Mitchell (2009), student veterans may have a

problem focusing in academic classes. One could presume the PTSD-related challenges in the work place presented by Schnurr et al. (2009) could also exist for student veterans in academic settings.

The authors pointed out two studies that analyzed functioning and PTSD symptom severity. In a survey of veterans who served in the Connecticut National Guard, results indicated that the symptom severity was related to psychosocial challenges at home, work and school (Schnurr, et al., 2009). Arguably, many challenges that the veteran population contends with may extend to student veterans and their successful college transition. The veteran PTSD and TBI veteran issues have been addressed at the national level, and this awareness and responsiveness may lead institutions of higher education to a greater awareness of the conditions.

National Policy Responses and Positions on PTSD and TBI

Addressing the stigma of PTSD. Earlier in the chapter, I presented information that discussed the military stigma of PTSD, a concern addressed by former Army Secretary Pete Geren who spoke at a Pentagon roundtable on troop care, and stated that, "stigma is a challenge. It's a challenge in society in general. It's certainly a challenge in the culture of the Army, where we have a premium on strength physically, mentally, emotionally" (Kruzel, 2008). According to former Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates who addressed the concern directly, "We have no higher priority in the Department of Defense, apart from the war itself, than taking care of our men and women in uniform who have been wounded, who have both visible and unseen wounds" (Kruzel, 2008).

Former Army Chief of Staff Gen. George W. Casey Jr. underscored the need to research and take action to prevent what some have called the "signature injuries" of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, PTSD and TBI (Kruzel, 2008). Kruzel (2008) indicated that in July 2007, the Department of the Army began a "chain-teaching" program which required all soldiers to learn about PTSD and TBI, including its available treatments. According to Kruzel (2008) a response to a survey suggests that the mental health services climate has changed. The survey indicated that although the stigma remained, Iraq soldiers were more inclined to request mental health care, (Kruzel, 2008).

Seemingly, efforts to address mental health issues continued as Gilmore (2008) noted that the Defense Department examined new treatments to assist service members who suffered from PTSD and TBI. In 2008, then Army Brig. Gen. Loree K. Sutton was the director of the Defense Centers of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury. She noted that, "part of our effort really is aimed at transforming our culture to move from what has been a very illness and medically focused culture and absolutely broadening it to where we're focused on resilience, on performance, on those things that individuals, families, leaders, and communities can do that will both maintain their wellness (and performance)" (Kruzel, 2008). According to Kruzel (2008), approximately $300 million has been targeted for psychological health and brain injuries. The funding was directed to support service members in Iraq and Afghanistan who were involved in counterinsurgency-type action, which Gen. Sutton described as "one of the most psychologically corrosive environments known to warfare" (Kruzel,

2008). Fortunately for U. S. service members who suffered from mental health issues, progress to address the concerns has continued.

In 2013, then deputy chief of staff for operations with Army Medical Command, Brig. Gen. John M. Cho, indicated that PTSD and TBI were not only military-specific issues, but "deserved a national discussion" as well(Vergun, 2013). Vergun (2013) noted that Gen. Cho suggested a significant part of that discussion need to find ways to reduce the stigma connected with mental health issues. Moreover, it was suggested that agencies inside and outside the military need to collaborate on how to better identity and treat PTSD and TBI (Vergun, 2013). The national concern and response to symptoms of PTSD and TBI can serve as a guide to encourage higher education institutions to implement practices that highlight awareness of PTSD and TBI. Moreover, campus awareness can lead to the development of needed support services for student veterans. Collaboration efforts to address PTSD and TBI issues have increased and continue.

National initiatives to address TBI and PTSD. As mentioned by Vergun (2013), there is national concern about TBI and PTSD. To further explore the examination of TBI, the U. S. Army participated in a $60 million TBI research study sponsored by the National Football League (NFL), General Electric Corp., and Under Armour Corp. (Vergun, 2013). Vergun (2013) also reported that as part of a collaborative national agency effort, $700 million was allocated to study PTSD and TBI. In addition, the Army set up seven "restorative centers" in Afghanistan in an effort to identity and treat TBI (Vergun, 2013).

Moreover, action was taken by President Barrack Obama to address military mental health conditions. On August 31, 2012, President Obama signed an executive order (EO) directing federal agencies to establish a National Research Action Plan (NRAP) on PTSD, TBI, and other mental health conditions (White House Office of the Press Secretary, 2012). The EO explains how limited knowledge of the underlying elements of PTSD, long-term effect of TBI, and warning suicide signals hinder prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of the conditions. The Departments of Defense, VA, Health and Human Services, and Education were ordered to "improve agency research into these conditions and reduce the number of affected men and women through better prevention, diagnosis, and treatment" (National Research Action Plan, 2013). The EO called for strategies to enhance diagnosis and treatment of PTSD, TBI, and related mental health issues (White House Office of the Press Secretary, 2012).

According to Insel (2013), the NRAP intends to standardize, integrate, and share data regarding PTSD, TBI, and mental health conditions. Moreover, Insel (2013) noted the NRAP hopes to increase the inventory of tissue, blood, and cerebrospinal fluid samples to conduct additional research on the aforementioned conditions. To enhance understanding of the conditions, the NRAP intends to identify predictive or diagnostic biomarkers for PTSD and TBI that can be used in clinical trials to effectively align patients and treatments (Insel, 2013). The respective federal agency collaboration and expanded research into the identification and treatment of PTSD, TBI, and other mental health issues can hopefully reduce the personal health, mental, and social problems the conditions cause.

There may be opportunities for higher education institutions to obtain information from and collaborate with other entities to address PTSD and TBI-related issues. These issues can lead to other concerns for both student veterans and campuses. An additional health and social concern that some veterans contend with is alcohol and/or substance abuse. As the next section discusses, there may be different reasons why some veterans struggle with alcohol and/or substance abuse. The influencers that lead to veteran alcohol and/or substance abuse could likely impact student veterans on college campuses.

Veteran Alcohol and Substance Abuse

Jakupcak, Tull, McDermott, Kaysen, Hunt, and Simpson (2010) pointed out that researchers have observed high rates of alcohol misuse in military service members who returned from OIF and OEF. The authors noted that alcohol misuse can partially be explained by certain demographic conditions and military service members. Jakupcak et al. (2010) indicated that most OIF and OEF veterans are males under twenty-five years of age. Further, the authors suggested that regular alcohol consumption may be an accepted aspect of military culture. Although cultural influences may play a role, part of the alcohol misuse may include self-medication efforts to address PTSD or depression. Therefore, OIF and OEF combat veterans are more likely to misuse alcohol than non-combatants (Jakupcak et al., 2010). Although somewhat controversial, there are situations known as comorbidity, where alcohol and/or substance abuse disorders co-occur with anxiety disorders (Bolton, Cox, Clara, & Sareen, 2006).

According to Bolton et al. (2006), three basic mechanisms explain why two anxiety disorders could occur in the same person. The first relationship is causal, whereby one disorder initiates the second. The second mechanism that causes anxiety disorder co-occurrence is indirect, where one disorder affects a third variable, which elevates the risk of the development of a second disorder. The third mechanism contains no causal relationship. The associational linkage of certain risk factors creates a likely opportunity for the development of two disorders.

Two proposed theories relate to the linkage of anxiety and substance use disorders. The first suggests a primary anxiety disorder supports the development of a substance use disorder. This theory is characterized as the self-medication hypothesis (Bolton et al., 2006). Shipherd, Stafford, and Tanner (2004) noted that the self-medication hypothesis has research support, but debate continues as to whether a causal relationship exists. The second proposed theory that links anxiety and substance use disorders submits that a primary substance use disorder activates an anxiety disorder (Bolton et al., 2006). However, Bolton et al. (2006) also indicated there is disagreement with respect to the association between substance abuse and anxiety disorders.

In cases where veterans misuse alcohol to self-medicate PTSD and depression symptoms, the unique role of each disorder must be understood, and PTSD symptoms that are closely linked with alcohol abuse must be identified (Jakupcak, et al., 2010). The authors noted that four PTSD symptom clusters have been established. Those include re-experiencing, effortful avoidance, emotional numbing, and hyper-arousal. However, Jakupcak et al. (2010) also noted that a study of Vietnam veterans who linked hyper-

arousal symptoms and alcohol misuse were not found in a study of returning Kosovo service members. That study indicated that Kosovo deployed troops had had an associational linkage between PTSD re-experiencing symptoms and alcohol misuse. However, the Jakupcak et al. (2010) study found positive relationships between alcohol misuse, depression, and PTSD. The following section examines the service member or veteran suicide risk.

Veteran Suicide Risk

Suicide is a concern for any individual in any population. It is important for college campuses to have suicide prevention programs in place for students. In addition, however, the research on veteran suicide is intended to indicate the need for college campuses to be aware of the risk of student veteran suicides. Selby et al. (2010) indicated that there are approximately one million suicide deaths in the world every year. The United States suicide rate is approximately 11 suicide deaths for every 100,000 people. With suicide rates between 9 and 15 individuals per 100,000 people, suicide is the second most common cause of death in the United States military (Selby et al., 2010). Ilgen et al. (2010) contended that from a mortality perspective, suicide is preventable. Moreover, the identification of high-risk subgroups is necessary for appropriate prevention and treatment efforts (Ilgen, et al., 2010). With respect to the veteran population, Selby et al. (2010) noted that during peacetime, the military suicide rate is typically lower than the civilian rate. However, during the last few years, the

military service member suicide rate has risen (LeardMann et al., 2013; Rudd, Goulding, & Bryan, 2011).

Selby et al. (2009) discussed a suicidal behavior theory that contends three variables must exist in order for an individual to attempt suicide. Those were characterized as obstructed belongingness, a perception of burdensomeness, and the ability to inflict lethal self-injury. These three variables can help determine who is both suicidal and capable of committing suicide (Selby et al., 2009). Selby et al. (2009) explained that perceptions of burdensomeness and obstructed belongingness comprise what an Interpersonal-Psychological Theory of Suicide presented by Joiner (2005) as a "desire for death" (Selby et al., 2009). The authors suggested that a suicidal study indicated that although approximately 15% of the United States population considers suicide at some point in their lives, the attempt to completion is approximately 25 to 1.

Leard Mann et al. (2013) pointed out that despite prevention initiatives; suicide has increased in the U. S. military in recent years. According to LeardMann et al. (2013), U. S. military suicides rates increased from 10.3 to 11.3 per 100,000 individuals to 16.3 per 100,000 in 2008. The authors further noted suicide is a challenging phenomenon. The U. S. Department of Defense (DOD) has closely examined the escalation of psychological problems in active duty service members over the last decade of combat in Iraq (OIF) and Afghanistan (OEF) (Rudd, Goulding, & Bryan, 2011). The authors noted that the DOD attributed the increasing suicide rates to operational demand increases, repeated deployments, and insufficient time at home between deployments. Rudd, Goulding and Bryan (2011) noted that the suicide rates among active-duty service

members in the OIF and OEF wars have doubled since the wars began. The authors also referenced a study that indicated combat deployed active-duty males have greater suicide risk than civilian males. Rudd, Goulding and Bryan (2011) pointed out that prior to OIF and OEF, active-duty service member suicide risk was lower than civilian suicide risk.

Ilgen et a. (2010) pointed out that research has supported associations between the risk of suicide and psychiatric conditions such as depression, PTSD, bi-polar disorder, and substance abuse. Rudd, Goulding and Bryan (2011) conducted a national sample study to examine the emotional adjustment, psychological symptoms, and suicide risk in college veteran students. The researchers found a strong level of suicide risk, in that approximately 35% of the sample experienced severe anxiety, 24% experienced severe depression, and nearly 46% experienced PTSD symptoms. Moreover, 46% of the sample thought about suicide, and 20% had a suicidal plan. Approximately 10.4% thought about suicide often or very often, 7.7% made a suicide attempt, and 3.8% of the study participants believed that suicide was either likely or very likely (Rudd, Goulding, & Bryan, 2011).

The study strongly indicated that a significant number of student veterans experience major psychiatric symptoms, and a large number are at a considerable suicide risk level (Rudd, Goulding, & Bryan, 2011). Moreover, 82% of those who attempted suicide experienced PTSD symptoms (Rudd, Goulding, & Bryan, 2011). Rudd, Goulding and Bryan (2011) cautioned that sometimes PTSD symptoms are overlooked when they are comorbid with elevated levels of depression, hopelessness, and suicidality.

An additional study was conducted that examined the suicide risk in current and former military service members. The study designed and conduct by LeardMann et al. (2013) utilized participants from 2001, 2004, and 2007. Study participants included current and former service members from all military branches, including, active and Reserve/National Guard. Surprisingly, the study's findings did not conclude that the length and number of deployments and combat experiences are directly linked to an increased risk of service member suicide (LeardMann et al., 2013). The study conducted by LeardMann et al. (2013) found that risk factors associated with the study's participants were consistent with civilian populations, which included male sex and mental disorders.

The study conducted by LeardMann et al. (2013) supported other research (Ilgen, et al. 2010; Rudd, Goulding & Bryan, 2011) that found mental health problems, including manic-depressive disorder, depression, and alcohol-related issues, had a significant association with increased suicide risk. The authors further noted that mental health initiatives in the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs provide an opportunity to help mitigate the risk of veteran suicide. The authors expressed concern that college campuses need to adequately provide medical and counseling support for student veterans who may experience psychiatric disorder symptoms that lead to the increased risk of suicide. In addition to suicide risk for veterans on college campuses, I have presented other transition concerns. In what follows, I will present social transition assistance from military to civilian life that may aid veterans as they continue the transition to college.

Transition Assistance for U. S. Military Veterans

The examination of suicide and other veteran population issues such as PTSD, TBI, substance abuse, physical disabilities, and relationship changes contribute to a veteran's transition to both civilian and college life. Therefore, transition from the military to college should continue to be examined as a process that includes steps and stages that provide support for military veterans. As formerly noted, the VA offers medical and psychological support for veterans. In addition, however, there are initiatives supporting the social transition process. The movement from the military to civilian life is a major step for veterans. As a step in the transition from military service member to college student, I will next present a social transition program that may serve as an opportunity to help veterans as a part of the transition process to college.

The Department of Defense has acknowledged the significance of the transition from the military to civilian life. According to Cronk (2012), the Defense Department began a new pilot program designed to assist with the transition from the military to civilian life. The program is known as the Transition Goals Plans Success, or Transition GPS, and is designed for service members who are leaving the military (Cronk, 2012). According to Susan Kelly, the deputy director for the Transition to Veterans Program Office, the Transition GPS guides service members through a set of informational modules that help enable service members to create transition strategies (Cronk, 2012). Kelly also indicated that with some exceptions, the program will be mandatory for service members, reservists, and national guardsmen (Cronk, 2012). The study attempts to focus on veterans who have specific needs or have different military backgrounds.

The study examined different categories of veterans. Not surprisingly, the Transition GPS pilot studies concluded that service members who were single had different transition needs. With regard to military experience or background, the studies found that each of the service branches have different cultures and personalities (Vergun, 2013). The Transition GPS focuses on pre-service separation classes that include health care, life insurance and disability, higher education, vocational training, and home loans. Vergun (2013) also reported that the transition program includes social and psychological counseling sessions for service members to help the transition from a structured environment to civilian life. Additionally, the Transition GSP assists a service member's move from military to civilian life while other programs have been established to assist veterans continue their transition from the military as civilians.

On March 13, 2015, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced the formation of an advisory committee to provide advice to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs. The committee's charge is to offer advice on how to improve VA customer service, veterans' outcomes, and strengthen VA reform and excellence (United States Department of Veterans Affairs, 2013). According to the VA, committee members are extensively experienced in customer service, organizational dynamics, and veterans' advocacy. Current VA Secretary Robert A. McDonald noted, "The collective wisdom of our committee members is invaluable and each of them understands that VA must improve customer service and focus the department on the needs of our veterans. They are dedicated to that mission, and I am grateful for their principled service to our veterans" (United States Department of Veterans Affairs, 2015). As the transition from

the military to civilian life presents a significant step in the eventual transition to college, I will now examine veterans' college transition concerns. As one might expect, some types of transition issues do not necessarily begin when a service member leaves the military, nor do they necessarily begin when a veteran enters college.

Veterans' College Transition Issues

Regardless of a college student's background or age, there are transition issues that all students face. Ackerman, DiRamio, and Mitchell (2009) indicated that student veterans, as do their student colleagues, struggle with traditional college transition issues such as administrative processing, advising and counseling needs, and financial guidance and assistance. Therefore, they may experience some or all of the same types of transition experiences that other students contend with. However, student veterans have had different life experiences and transition issues than traditional 18 to 24 year old college students. For example, as student veterans face traditional student challenges, they must meet them without the structure and order that they have become accustomed to in the military. Livingston and Bauman (2013) indicated that military members serve very specific roles in a rigid military environment and are often bewildered by choices and options in an open college environment. Additionally, transition issues unique to student veterans may be complex and varied and often result from war-related combat or service related events. As a population, veterans have had unique life circumstances that are sometimes reflected in issues such as Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome (PTSD),

physical and mental disabilities, military deployment challenges, identity conflict, and socialization adjustment.

A study conducted by Steele, Salcedo, and Coley (2010) suggested that college transition experiences for veterans can be varied. For example, research found that some veterans described easy transitions to college. Those veteran students noted the military had provided the opportunity to develop focus, discipline, and initiative to succeed in an academic environment (Steele, Salcedo, & Coley, 2010). The study also pointed out, however, that a majority of veteran students noted major challenges: meeting academic expectations that were different from military requirements; management of academic and personal responsibilities; relationships with non-veteran student colleagues; and, management of military service-related disabilities (Steele, Salcedo, & Coley, 2010).

Arguably, life circumstances or experiences can impact any student's transition to college. Furthermore, as noted earlier in this chapter by Javidi and Yadollahie (2012), a veteran issue such as PTSD may be caused by an event that is not military-related. However, the position can also be taken that awareness of particular population concerns can assist in providing support for individuals within the population. The chapter continues with an examination of particular military veterans' issues that may impact their transitions to college. The first to be examined is student veteran PTSD.

Student Veteran PTSD

As a psychiatric condition, PTSD was discussed in a broad context earlier in this chapter. Javidi and Yadollahie (2012), noted that PTSD may result from events other

than war. Regardless of how the condition developed, it can play a significant role in a person's life. In the context of a student veteran, PTSD can also have a significant impact on both transition to college and success. Zinger and Cohen (2010) contended that college counselors and health officials should be aware of PTSD symptoms and treatment protocols. Zinger and Cohen (2010) also pointed out the need for health officials and counselors to be aware of the PTSD symptom clusters. Those were presented earlier by Jakupcak et al. (2010) as re-experiencing symptoms, avoidance, emotional numbing, and hyper-arousal. The authors suggested sensitivity training workshops could help mitigate student and faculty insensitivity with respect to specific veterans' issues.

Student Veteran Disabilities

It should come as no surprise that in addition to TBI and PTSD there are numerous other disabilities student veterans may bring to college. As previously mentioned, approximately two million veterans will be eligible for the Post-9/11 G. I. Bill (McBain, Kim, Cook, & Snead, 2012). The number of disabled veterans who enter college could be significant. As noted by Steele, Salcedo, and Coley (2010), some student veterans already rely on disability services support on their campus. With the inclusion of PTSD, Grossman (2009) estimated that 40% of veterans may have different types of disabilities that also include traumatic brain injury (TBI), depression, substance abuse, hearing and vision-related issues, physical mobility issues, and bodily disfigurement from burns and toxin exposure. Kraus and Rattray (2013) pointed out that

amputations are the most common military service-related disability. The potential number of student veterans who need campus disability support services could increase as student veteran enrollment increases.

Physical disabilities exist in different forms and present unique problems for veterans. As injured veterans contend with mental or physical disabilities, some undergo extensive rehabilitation. Some require medical support devices such as wheelchairs, prosthetics, orthotics or sensory equipment for mobility and independence (Kraus & Rattray, 2013). Some concerns exist for veterans whose disabilities are not service-related. Those veterans may sometimes feel unworthy of services and support (Kraus & Rattray, 2013).

Regardless of the type of disability or its effect, the impact of particular mental and physical disabilities may result in consequential challenges for student veterans. Kraus and Rattray (2013) noted that other significant health concerns resulting from war-related disabilities included insomnia, nightmares, physical pain, extreme anger, memory flashbacks, anxiety, and loneliness. In an attempt to self-medicate, veterans often turn to drugs and alcohol for relief (Kraus & Rattray, 2013). The physical and mental conditions that have been discussed present often unique challenges for student veterans. In addition to health issues, certain student veterans have had to manage active duty deployment issues during college enrollment.

College Student Military Deployment

Another transition issue for student veterans is the uncertainty that has existed and may continue for military reservists who have been activated or reactivated to military duty status. Doubler and Listman (2007) indicated that during the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, the United States has relied more on National Guard and Reserve troops than it has since World War II and the Korean War. The number of reservists fluctuates depending on combat deployment needs and the levels of the active-duty military troops. Consequently, college stability for many students who are members of reserve units can be uncertain, and military reserve students are often in activation, deployment, or deactivation status (Livingston & Bauman, 2013). Depending on active-duty troop strength levels, National Guard and Reserve student veterans may have experienced multiple activation, deployment, and deactivation cycles (Livingston & Bauman, 2013).

With respect to multiple transition events, Bauman (2009) indicated that when reservists are called to active military duty, a typical deployment lasts for eighteen months. That deployment period can cause various kinds of stability issues for student veterans. Reservists who are deployed during a semester must often withdraw from classes and may lose two or more semesters during the deployment period (Bauman, 2009). The period of time that reservists are on active duty creates an even greater age separation between student veterans and their college student peers. Another transition issue student reservists face is the life decisions that must be made between the time they become aware of possible deployment and actual activation orders are issued.

For instance, a student reservist who becomes aware of possible activation must determine if he or she should drop classes. In some instances, college professors are not accommodating when student veterans' military orders require deployment or military exercises and classes are missed (Elliott, Gonzalez, & Larsen, 2011). Livingston and Bauman (2013) contended that it is often difficult for student veterans to balance the roles of service member and college student.

Social Transition to College

In addition to physical disabilities, PTSD and military activation, research indicates social transition to college may be a challenge for student veterans. The culture of belonging that existed in the military appears to be a concern for student veterans on a college campus. Ackerman, DiRamio, and Mitchell (2009) indicated that student veterans struggle to develop the kind of relationships in college they had with former service members. Arguably, military service offered an environment that established a sense of community among service members. Scheibe (1995) contended that successful communities reflect substantial sacrifice and investment. The author further indicated that sacrifice includes the release of individual property or personal resources. The loss of military community may be difficult for student veterans.

Student veterans' campus relationships. Ackerman, DiRamio, and Mitchell (2009) suggested that student veterans' military experiences create challenges for student veterans to develop close relationships with traditional college students. Although veterans have a strong sense of mission and community, Livingston (2009)

contended that military service members are taught to solve problems independently and sometimes don't seek help or develop relationships. To develop relationships or merge into a cultural environment, Ackerman, DiRamio and Mitchell (2008) indicated that student veterans used different strategies to develop a sense of belonging on a college campus. The strategies included joining a Greek fraternity, "blending in" to look and act like other students, and spending time with a campus military ROTC unit. Moreover, a sense of belonging may involve different acceptance levels. Ackerman, DiRamio and Mitchell (2008) noted student veterans looked for faculty acknowledgment of and appreciation for their military service. Other campus strategies could help fill student veterans' need to belong.

Strategies to help transition student veterans. Campus transition strategies for veterans could take different forms. Rumann and Hamrick (2010) indicated that various reintegration strategies might help student veterans in transition to college. One was presented by Ackerman DiRamio and Mitchell (2009) who suggested that a supportive college campus climate helps veterans transition from identity roles as service members to college students. Another was offered by Rumann and Hamrick (2010), who noted that the formation of veterans' student groups helped, for student veterans feel most comfortable with each other.

In an attempt to provide transition assistance, Ackerman, DiRamio, and Mitchell (2009) noted that some higher education institutions have created veterans support and processing centers where admissions, veterans' benefits, and counseling assistance is offered. Lokken, Pfeffer, McAuley, and Strong (2009) indicated that some institutions

had offered veterans' resource centers that not only provided information and guidance to student veterans, but also offered a place where veterans and their families could meet. Ackerman, DiRamio, and Mitchell (2009) and Lokken, Pfeffer, McAuley, and Strong (2009) noted that campuses that provide these types of support services are referred to as referred to as "veteran-friendly campuses".

Summary

The literature review discussed the study's theoretical framework and various types of veterans' transition and identity challenges. The theoretical framework components of adult-transition theory and multiple dimensions of identity theory offered a research lens to study the transition of military veterans to college. In that context, student veterans were examined as adults in transition, and individuals who were required to maintain certain roles, responsibilities, and identities. As noted, transition challenges into civilian life could continue into college. Therefore, certain transitions to civilian life were suggested to continue and be a part of the veteran transition to college. Lastly, the chapter examined particular student veteran transition issues. The literature review and theoretical framework serve as anchors for the study and help support the research methodology that will follow in Chapter III.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Background

This chapter presents the research methodology, methods, and procedures used in the study. The research approach is a qualitative examination of military veterans' transition to college. The study's participants are individuals who represent United States military veterans who enter college after active duty or during reserve status. The group of veterans who participated in the study either served in the Air Force, Army, Army Reserves, Marines, National Guard, or Navy. Furthermore, the research group includes individuals from various ethnic groups and both male and female student veterans.

The qualitative research method was selected for this study to extract deep meanings from the research participants. Merriam (2009) indicated that qualitative research is interpretive and contended a researcher wants to understand the meaning a phenomenon holds for a participant. However, as Merriam (2009) also pointed out, meaning is constructed. In qualitative studies, research participants construct realities in association with their social contexts (Merriam, 2009). Therefore, the act of reality construction provides an opportunity to obtain a significant or deep level of meaning from research participants.

As research methods, qualitative and quantitative studies differ. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) contrasted the two methods with the argument that qualitative research

emphasizes entities, meanings, values, and processes that are not experimentally measured by amount, frequency, or concentration. Conversely, quantitative research focuses on the causal relationships between variables that are quantitatively measured in a neutral, unbiased, value-free experimental method (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The qualitative inquiry method used in this study provided the opportunity to obtain research participants' reality constructions about the transition from the military to college. My research goal was to present those individual, uniquely constructed realities and interpret the meanings of the student veteran transition challenges.

To develop an in-depth qualitative examination of the transition of military veterans to college, I relied on a qualitative research foundation established by Lincoln and Guba (1985). The authors advanced an approach that was guided by specific qualitative research axioms. The naturalistic axioms and the suggested alignments with this study follow.

1. *The nature of reality.* Lincoln and Guba (1985) contended that realities are constructed in multiple forms and are holistic. Participants in this study created various realities based on military training, experiences, victories, defeats, happiness, and anguish. Many of the participants experienced complex and multi-layered life events. Their respective realities were shaped by events including international travel, diverse cultural experiences, combat experiences, and various kinds of operations and jobs that occurred in a significant organizational context. Furthermore, some of the student veterans

encountered levels of life and death events that permanently formed life perspectives.

2. *The relationship of knower to known*. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the qualitative research approach recognizes and examines the relationship of the participant and his or her creation of reality. In this process, the researcher serves as the interpreter of that reality and helps convey meaning contained in the individual realities, whereby an inseparable alignment occurs in the research process. The axiom suggests the relationship between student veterans and the respective college transition experiences constructs a reality that creates knowledge that exists as a result of that inseparable relationship.
3. *The possibility of generalization*. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) naturalist generalization is both intuitive and empirical, accessing one's personal and vicarious experience(s). The purpose of naturalistic inquiry is to develop working hypotheses that express an individual's story. The authors suggested this approach allows those who receive this type of personal experiential information to derive naturalistic generalizations and expand their particular understandings of the phenomenon being studied. In this study, veterans' personal experiences and realities present individual insight into particular transition challenges from the military to college, with the intent to utilize participant perspectives to broaden student veteran transition understanding.

4. *The possibility of causal linkages*. Lincoln and Guba (1985) indicated that cause and effect become indistinguishable in the study's simultaneous, mutual shaping. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the purposive understanding that emerges from the interaction of investigator and phenomenon is a constructed reality equally shaped by the researcher's purpose and the research participant's perspective. The reality emerging from the research participants in this study provides an opportunity for a deeper and broader understanding of student veterans' college transition challenges. For example, some veterans who return to college have extensive combat experiences. Some have lingering physical and mental issues that remain as they enter college. Those and other experiences student veterans have offer opportunities to share in unique, sometimes complex life events.
5. *The role of values in an inquiry*. In the qualitative research approach, inquiry is bound by values. Lincoln and Guba (1985) contended that qualitative research values include those of the researcher, substantive paradigm, methodological paradigm, and cultural setting. In a qualitative inquiry, the impact of values is manifested in the researcher's perceptions and invested values, the essential nature and characteristics of a qualitative research approach, the application of the qualitative research process, the research setting, and the cultural values of the researcher and participants. The research values regarding veteran transition to college interact with the essence and application of naturalistic inquiry, and they are further influenced

by the researcher, the participants and the setting's cultural values with respect to student veteran college transition. As a veteran and researcher, I hold particular value perceptions about a veteran's transition to college. With an acknowledgment of and commitment to naturalistic inquiry, cultural intersections of the researcher, participants, and environment combine to create a value system embedded in the study. Military service is guided by values such as honor, loyalty, commitment, and accountability. Those particular values can become embedded in student veterans' transition perceptions and reality presentations.

As the axioms indicate, the purpose of a qualitative study is to extract meaningful information from research participants. Student veteran transitions experiences can vary between individuals. Therefore, the study was designed to extract personal, comprehensive perspectives from each student veteran through a careful and deliberate interview process. To penetrate the rich layers of data obtained from personal interviews, focus groups and additional data clarification were used to help confirm the reliability of the data. To accomplish these research goals, a case study was utilized as the research methodology.

Case Study as the Research Methodology

Merriam (2009) noted that a case study is a comprehensive examination of a bounded system. Creswell (2007) also indicated that a case study serves as a "bounded system," and can include an event, program, activity, or individuals. Merriam (2002)

argued a case study is used to examine a bounded system such as a person, program, or community because the system indicates characteristics of interest to a researcher. This study's research design and methodology are a case study of United States military veterans who are college students on a comprehensive public higher education institution. As a specific event, this particular case study examined transition issues of veterans who entered college.

Merriam (2002) suggested that a case study can describe a choice of what will be studied and argued that a case study can be considered a unit of interest that has boundaries. In this study's context, boundaries provide a case study's scope limitations. This study's boundaries or limitations are restricted to a single group of student veterans at Stephen F. Austin State University, and this particular study was designed to extract comprehensive college transition experiences from student veterans at the university. Moreover, as Merriam (1998)indicated, a case provides an opportunity to obtain deep meaning from study participants.

As discussed earlier in the chapter, a qualitative study provides a research opportunity to examine participants' constructed realities emerging from the research process. Personal interviews and focus groups allow participants to express personal perspectives that have been influenced by unique individual experiences. The expression of those constructed realities provides an opportunity to obtain meaningful research information. Twenty-first century veterans are a new generation of military service members whose experiences offer different perspectives from former military veterans.

For example, the reasons for military engagement are different; technology has changed, and the cultural influences of warfare are significant.

To explain further, the current and former service members who participated in this study served in the U.S. armed forces after the worst international attack on U.S. soil (retrieved from http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/10288.pdf). Second, military technology and capability have evolved in a remarkable fashion. As an example, on February 15, 2006, the Army Capabilities Integration Center (ARCIC) was formed to support the design, development, and integration of force capabilities for the Army (http://www.arcic.army.mil/AboutARCIC/about-arcic.aspx). As stated by the U.S. Army, "ARCIC's mission is to develop, evaluate, and integrate concepts, requirements, and solutions for the Army" (http://www.arcic.army.mil/AboutARCIC/about-arcic.aspx). Finally, technological advancements allow information and intelligence to be gathered and evaluated very quickly. I approached the study with the expectation that the life experiences of the veterans, combined with twenty-first century international, societal, and military changes, offered an interesting opportunity to extract deep meaning and comprehensive data from the veterans' college transition experiences.

Use of the Case Study

The examination of complex life issues was important for this study, and Merriam's (1998) assertion that deep meaning can be obtained from a case study was crucial, for the research process was designed to extract deep and comprehensive aspects of the veterans' college transition challenges and experiences in order to understand and

articulate transition issues that many student veterans may face. Hays and Singh (2011) noted that a case study can be utilized to research individuals, settings, processes, and events. In this study, the student veterans will serve as units of analysis. In their discussion of units of analysis, Hays and Singh (2011) noted that the phrase unit of analysis is sometimes used synonymously with the term case. However, the authors argued that a unit of analysis specifies a case study's particular perspective. Therefore, the unit of analysis category for this case study are former and current military service members who provided individual and collective student-life transition experiences.

Case Setting and Report

Using a description provided by Boyatzis (1998), the case is categorized as an organizational setting, for the study took place at Stephen F. Austin State University (SFA), located in Nacogdoches, Texas. SFA is a public, comprehensive university with a Fall 2014 enrollment of 12,801 students. The study participants (individuals) were military veterans who had enlisted in the military and enrolled at the university or graduated from SFA since the Fall 2007 semester. The research was incorporated into a case report process as discussed by Hays and Singh (2011) and, as a conceptual framework, included an examination of the case background, setting, economic and political perspectives, and other related considerations using adult-transition theory and multiple dimensions of identity theory components.

SFA was chosen as a research site for a number of reasons. First, SFA has a sizeable number of student veterans. The population of student veterans at SFA in the

Fall 2014 semester was approximately 1.6 percent of the student body. In comparison to the U. S. population, Eikenberry and Kennedy(2013) reported that less than 0.5 percent of Americans serve in the armed forces. The student veterans who received federal benefits in the Fall 2014 semester included 124 in the Post 9/11 G. I. Bill program, 14 who received the Montgomery G. I. Bill (C. Hardy, personal communication to Danny R. Gallant, April 27, 2015) and 63 who received the Texas Hazlewood tuition and fee exemption. (B. Williams, personal communication to Danny R. Gallant, April 28, 2015). Second, the student veterans are active on the SFA campus and in the Nacogdoches, Texas community. Student veteran campus engagement led to the establishment of a Veterans Resource Center (VRC) within the university's student center.

The formal development of the VRC began when a group of veterans asked to present a report at a regularly scheduled meeting of the university's board of regents. During that presentation, the veterans' group discussed student veterans' needs and concerns. That meeting led to further discussions with student veterans and university administrators. Approximately 1,300 square feet was provided in the SFA Baker Pattillo Student Center for the VRC. As a third example of student veteran campus and community involvement, SFA student veterans have participated in various regional fund-raising events to provide additional resources for the VRC. Additionally, the campus veterans' group also participates in a local golf tournament to raise awareness of SFA student veteran concerns.

Formally opened in the 2012 Spring semester, the VRC is dedicated to student veterans at Stephen F. Austin State University. The student veterans who helped

establish the VRC had a vision of a separate space on campus where veterans could study, relax, or socialize with peers. The center provides computer workstations, tables, chairs, couches, lounge space, and a large-screen television for student veterans to use. Moreover, the VRC has a full-time coordinator who was an undergraduate student veteran at SFA and is currently working on a master's degree. He was the visionary for the student veteran resource center project and was also instrumental in the development of the center. As a graduate of SFA and director of the VRC, he serves as a counselor and mentor to the student veterans who attend SFA. The VRC director also played a critical role in data collection for the study. The student veteran population and active Veterans Resource Center supported the research opportunity that lead to the study's design.

Case Design

This study's design was guided and developed using the steps outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Those included establishing a focus for the inquiry, matching the paradigm and study's focus, aligning the inquiry paradigm and supporting theory, determining data sources, determining inquiry phases, determining instrumentation, planning data collection, and planning data analysis. With respect to a study design, Peshkin (1993) stated that:

> To qualitative researchers, what is to be learned does not invariably necessitate a particular study design involving theory, hypotheses, or generalization, though it may. It necessitates a judgment that leads them

> to decide what research designs they should frame to produce one or more imagined and as yet unimagined outcomes (p. 24).

The case study structure used to illustrate the college transition issues of military veterans was described by Hays and Singh (2011) as an intrinsic case study that guides a researcher who has a specific interest in a particular case. This study relied on data collected through personal interviews and focus group sessions. The data were obtained from twelve student veterans at Stephen F. Austin State University (SFA). The data collection efforts were guided by the study's theoretical framework, which served as a research lens to focus the study and included adult-transition theory and multiple dimensions of identity theory.

Researcher's Role and Profile

I served as the primary data collector in this case study. The research perspective and approach I used in the study was guided by Denzin and Lincoln (2005). The authors suggested that research is both participatory and participant driven. Furthermore, Denzin and Lincoln (2005) argued that a participatory research approach is not simply used to gather information or make sense of others' lives. In the context of research participation, researchers should communicate with individuals and groups and engage in appropriate cultural customs and practices (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). As Denzin and Lincoln (2005) suggested, I did not take a position outside of the research participants but positioned myself within the group with a participative approach.

The participative positioning was natural for me. As many of the veterans indicated, I was one of them. I served on active duty in the United States Army during the Vietnam-era from June 18, 1973 to June 17, 1976. Although the twenty-first century generation of veterans had learned new customs and traditions, I discovered we shared military customs, traditions, cultural influences and thinking. Additionally, another association between the SFA student veterans and me was that we had entered SFA as student veterans and relied on the G. I. Bill as support for our undergraduate education. I explained to the student veterans that my research role was to help tell their stories and provide insight into their transition needs. As the research developed, I became a closer part of the veteran community, and that family relationship strengthened the data collection participation. I developed friendships with some of the research participants, and we addressed each other on a first-name basis. In fact, information I obtained from two personal interviews allowed me to provide some career guidance for two research participants.

I currently serve as vice president for finance and administration at SFA, and my division responsibilities include finance and general administrative support functions. The VRC does not report to me, and my role at the university allows no involvement in veteran recruitment, admission, or enrollment functions that occur within the division of academic affairs. Financial aid and Post-9/11 G.I. Bill liaison functions also are contained in academic affairs. The Veterans Resource Center and student veteran counseling are considered student life functions and are contained in the university affairs division.

To gain and secure trust of potential research participants, I emphasized my veteran status and minimized my university position. After IRB approval was obtained from Texas A&M University and Stephen F. Austin State University, I met with a group of student veterans who had been selected through a snowball sampling process. I explained to the group about the study as well as my desire to gain a better understanding of student veterans' needs and concerns. I suggested to the group of potential participants that I was one of them and explained my return to college as a veteran, emphasizing my concerns about student veteran college transition success. One asked in that meeting how I was to be addressed. I asked the student veterans to address me by my first name. After that meeting, I worked with the VRC coordinator to select a group of participants. More specific information about the researcher follows.

After military service in the U.S. Army, I enrolled at SFA in the fall of 1980 as a full-time, married student, graduated in 1983 and began work at the university immediately after graduation. When I attended college, student veterans were not acknowledged or recognized. In fact, I have known only a few student veterans during my time at SFA. Moreover, until the VRC was formed, student veterans had no visible presence on the SFA campus. I became interested in veterans' college transition experiences almost thirty years ago. In a class I taught as an adjunct, a student veteran approached me and indicated he was having problems fitting into the higher education environment. He indicated that as a U. S. Army airborne ranger infantryman, he had trust and responsibility in the military that could not be replaced as a college student. He noted that he was "somebody" in the military, and as a college student, he was just a

"number." In many ways, the student veterans in this study epitomize the transition concerns my former student had.

Data Collection Considerations and Approach

To begin the data collection process, steps were taken to obtain research information from participants. Lincoln and Guba (1985) noted there were formal and informal steps in making contact with research sources that include obtaining permission to interview participants and creating trusting relationships with the individuals. To develop those trusting relationships, I spent time visiting informally at the SFA Veterans Resource Center (VRC). I had met the coordinator of the VRC earlier, and we had numerous conversations before the research began. I was interested in the purpose of the VRC, and the coordinator was passionate about the development of the center. As that trusting relationship developed, I met other student veterans who spent time in the VRC.

Trust was crucial to the development of the study. Some veterans are tired of being examined and are often skeptical of a research study. As indicated earlier, I collected data from student veterans on the SFA campus or those who have graduated from SFA since the Fall 2007 semester. The VRC coordinator introduced me to many of the student veterans who spent time in the VRC and was instrumental in the sampling process I used to obtain research participants. He helped identify and recruit candidates based on research criteria that I will present later in the chapter. Based on the particular type of service and enlistment period, if an individual entered the U. S. military after September 11, 2001, that person would have likely graduated from college or be

expected to graduate after the Fall 2007 semester. The trust that emerged from spending time with student veterans was based on the strong bond between veterans. The relationships that developed from that trust are expanded further.

The sense of community and military camaraderie resonates with veterans. As a U.S. Army veteran who attended SFA after military service, I had a strong interest in the development and operation of the VRC. As noted, before this study began, I visited the center many times and met many student veterans. When the study was approved, many of the student veterans who used the VRC knew I was also a veteran. Although I had served in the Vietnam-era and was older than the student veterans, I developed a rapport with the VRC community and discussed my position at the university as a way to help with issues student veterans may have. I believe the trust established before data collection began enhanced the interview and data collection relationships. The coordinator of the VRC is working on a master's degree and is scheduled to graduate in May 2016. I met him when he was an undergraduate student, and we became friends. When I considered the study of veteran transition to college as a research topic, I met with him and explained my interest in the study. He was also interested because it provided an opportunity to identify veterans' college transition concerns.

After my research proposal had been approved by my dissertation committee, I obtained Institutional Review Board approval for the study with both Texas A&M University (TAMU) and Stephen F. Austin State University (SFA). The TAMU IRB had study oversight, and the SFA IRB approved data collection on the SFA campus. As formerly discussed, the VRC was established and constructed in order to provide a place

for veteran students to study and socialize, and the coordinator of the VRC is a military veteran and SFA graduate who, as also noted, is currently working on a master's degree. In addition to being included as one of the research participants, he helped identify research participants who met the various distinguishing criteria I included in the sample process. As stated previously, the VRC was an integral part of this study. The coordinator helped recruit research participants using sample criteria presented in a later section. I obtained data from personal interviews and focus groups from the student veteran community in the VRC. As a part of the research process, I maintained a reflexive journal, which provided me an opportunity to step back from the swirling elements of research and reflect on the individuals and purpose of the study. The reflexive journal also provided connectivity with research findings and research observations in the study. Moreover, the use of the reflexive journal helped promote research trustworthiness.

Reflexive Journal

Different scholars have noted the importance of a reflexive journal in qualitative research. Lincoln and Guba (1985) discussed the use of a reflexive journal as part of a process to establish trustworthiness in a study. The linkage between a reflexive journal and the establishment of study trustworthiness will be expanded later in the chapter. Moreover, in addition to the support of trustworthiness, the journal process strengthened personal interviews and focus group data collection, which will be discussed in more depth later in the chapter. Finally, as a result of the study's reliance on human

instruments, the data sources derived from a sampling process will be discussed before additional data collection methods that were used are presented.

Data Sources and Sampling Strategy

Data sources for the study were established with an appropriate sampling strategy designed to extract relevant, meaningful data. Merriam (1998) indicated that powerful sampling guides a researcher in the selection of a sample that will allow deep learning and discovery. Therefore, to obtain deep research information from research participants, I utilized purposive sampling to select the student veteran participants who provided research data for the study. Purposive sampling is a sampling approach championed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) who presented the process as one of the fourteen characteristics of naturalistic inquiry. Furthermore, Merriam (2009) indicated that purposeful or purposive sampling describes a sampling approach used to discover and understand significant and comprehensive issues and enable studies that are rich with information. Erlandson et al. (1993) noted that purposive sampling is essential in naturalistic inquiry and helps discover patterns and problems within the contexts of a study.

The purpose of this study was to unlock complex student veterans' college transition issues and struggles. Therefore, I used purposive sampling to identify a participant pool that could be utilized to provide good data for the study. Merriam (1998) argued that purposive sampling requires a determination of what selection criteria are essential in choosing the study sample. Boyatzis (1998) contended that selection criteria

should identify a unit(s) of analysis before sampling takes place. Therefore, in a sampling context, individuals served as units of analysis. Selection criteria will be discussed in the following section.

Sample selection criteria process. The process used to develop a research sample and the determination of sample selection criteria are examined here. Hays and Singh (2011) strongly cautioned that deliberate research sample planning is critical to an ethical, qualitative study. Boyatzis (1998) and Merriam (1998) suggested that selection criteria are essential to an appropriate research sample. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) indicated that rich, deep information could be obtained from participants by establishing specific sample selection criteria before the sample is selected. Therefore, I carefully established deliberate, specific research sample criteria before the sample was selected from the student veteran population at SFA.

Purposeful or purposive sampling was further refined as stratified purposeful sampling, which Hays and Singh (2011) described as a process whereby distinguishing features of a population subgroup could be demonstrated. Therefore, the study utilized stratified purposeful sampling to obtain research participants from the population of student veterans at Stephen F. Austin State University or from student veterans who enlisted and served after September 11, 2001, and graduated following the Fall 2007 semester. As noted earlier, if a person entered the U. S. military shortly after September 11, 2001, that individual would likely graduate or be expected to graduate after the Fall 2007 semester. Moreover, those who served in the military after September11, 2001, are eligible for the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill (PGIB). Persons who enlisted in the military and were

released after September 11, 2001, would be no older than thirty-one years of age in 2015 because the minimum age for military enlistment is seventeen years of age. If a person was seventeen years old on September 12, 2001, he or she would be thirty-one years old in 2015. Those criteria provided an expansive, diverse pool of veteran participants.

Sample selection criteria. Because of the different perspectives and experiences veterans offer, distinguishing criteria were used to stratify and select the sample. In order to further strengthen a diverse student veteran population sample and using individuals as a particular unit of analysis, criteria such as branch of service, gender, race, enlisted service member job function, age, and duty assignment were strategically incorporated into the sample selection process. The coordinator of the VRC helped identify student veterans who met the distinguishing criteria, and the individuals who were selected offered service, gender, race, military job function, age, and duty assignment diversity. The sample of veterans selected represents a broad cross-section of the military. In addition to military branch, gender, race, military job function, age and duty assignment diversity, the group also includes combat and non-combat veterans. The diverse background and experiences of military service members supported the selection of the qualitative method, whereby individual experiences and perspectives provided unique assessments of college transition. Those distinguishing criteria are expanded further in the following section.

Branch of service. One of the first distinguishing criteria used to stratify the sample and select participants was a veteran's military service branch, which refers to an

arm of a larger organization. In this context, a military branch refers to the different military service components that include the United States Air Force, Army, Coast Guard, Marines, and Navy. Students who served, or were serving, in reserve components of the respective branches were also considered to be part of the study's participation population. From a qualitative research perspective, I took the position that study participants from different military branches could offer different perspectives or challenges about transitions from the military to college since the respective branches of the military serve different defense and support functions.

The primary function of the Air Force is to provide United States air and space security and support combat ground operations. The basic missions of the Army and Marines are to provide ground support, while the Navy and Coast Guard provide sea and American coastline security and operations. Individuals enlist in different military branches for different reasons. In addition to particular preferences about the basic type of branch one prefers; ground operations, air, or naval, there are different enlistment age requirements for particular branches (http:todaysmilitary.com/joining/entrance-requirements). Furthermore, branches have different enlistment qualification scores (http:www.military.com/joined-armed-forces/asvab/asvab-test-explained.html). Different branch service functions suggest the possibility for different college transition experiences.

As noted in Chapter II, this study focused on individuals. From a research perspective, I intended for individuals to epitomize the broad military service collective. Personal experiences viewed through the respective lens of branch, gender, ethnicity,

age, job, and duty assignment represented a cross-section of military service members. Individual data collected from those diverse experiences were expected to provide meaningful insights into the transition of military veterans to college. As also noted earlier, student veterans who served in military reserve units also offered a distinctive research dimension.

Reservists who were called to active duty during college present unique types of student transition experiences. Livingston and Bauman (2013) noted that National Guard and other branch reservists may have experienced transition challenges in the forms of numerous activations, deployments, and active duty releases. When student reservists are called to active duty, a typical deployment lasts up to eighteen months, and a physical and social disconnection occurs (Bauman, 2009).

Gender. Another criterion that was used to select the participant sample was gender. Many women served in the armed forces during the past ten years and have been directly involved in military engagements. Boyd, Bradshaw and Robinson (2013) noted that over 200,000 have served in Iraq and Afghanistan. Furthermore, the authors pointed out the wars have led to more than 140 female casualties and over 1,000 have been wounded. In this study, it was expected that female service members could offer a unique examination of transition challenges. For example, McSally (2011) pointed out that women's combat exposure and experiences have not been appropriately recognized by the military or the public. This lack of social acceptance may linger as an emotional reconciliation concern that is a component of female service member student transition.

Another consideration for the use of gender in the sample criteria was that women may have dealt with another challenge in the military that can influence their transition as college students. Lingering issues caused by sexual harassment in the military may contribute to a college transition challenge. For example, as discussed in Chapter II, women in the military may be exposed to sexual harassment or trauma (Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009). Iverson and Anderson (2013) noted that a research survey indicated that 60 percent of military women had experienced sexual assault, described by the U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs as military sexual assault trauma (MST). Moreover, MST may be minimized as being a "woman's issue" instead of being appropriately categorized as PTSD (Iverson & Anderson, 2013). In addition to coping with a condition like MST, family responsibilities could be significant for women. The expectation that female student veterans manage family responsibilities was confirmed in this study. Both of the female research participants were mothers.

Ethnicity. A third distinguishing criterion that was used to select the sample was ethnicity. As an additional research criterion, veteran ethnicity will allow an additional research layer that will be used to further probe transition issues. Iverson and Anderson (2013) indicated that on the 2000 census, almost 30 percent of all women veterans were members of racial minority groups. The authors further noted that by 2020 Hispanic women will comprise approximately 9 percent of military veterans. Therefore, ethnicity was included as a sample characteristic to provide appropriate dimensions of a comprehensive, inclusive student veteran profile.

Age. The fourth criterion used in sample selection was the age of the participants. The maximum age for enlistment in the U. S. military varies by service branch. The United States Army, with a maximum enlistment age of thirty-five years of age, is the highest age for active duty enlistments among all branches (Department of Defense, n.d.). With respect to military reserve enlistment, at thirty-nine years of age, the Unites States Navy and Coast Guard have the highest maximum enlistment ages of all branches of service (Department of Defense, n.d.). Therefore, the sample age criterion was that current SFA student veterans or graduates who enlisted on or after September 11, 2001, were no older than thirty-nine years of age at the time of enlistment. If a thirty-nine year old individual enlisted in the military on September 12, 2001, he or she would be fifty-three years of age in 2015. Very few students enter college at fifty-three years of age or older.

Service member job function. The fifth criterion used in the sample selection process was a service member's job in the military. The designation Military Occupation Speciality (MOS), is used to classify an enlisted service member's job in the U.S. Army and U.S. Marines, (http://usmilitary.about.com/od/enlistedjo2/a/marinejobs.htm). The U.S. Air Force job enlisted classification system is described as an Air Force Specialty Code (AFSC) (http://usmilitary.about.com/od/airforceenlistedjobs/a/afjobs.htm), and the U.S. Navy enlisted job classifications are referred to as Navy Enlisted Ratings (Ratings) (http://usmilitary.about.com/od/enlistedjob1).

Since military job classifications vary, I will use the phrase, "Enlisted Service Member Job" (ESMJ) to refer to different military job categories. Therefore, ESMJ will

represent MOS for U.S. Army and U.S. Marine service members, AFSC for U.S. Air Force service members, and Ratings for U.S. Navy service members. A research participant's ESMJ was considered to be an essential criterion in this study because it was a consideration that a service member's particular job might influence his or her college transition experiences. For example, combat job functions require weapons and engagement training. Combat jobs include different types of ground and air operations. Enlisted combat service members serve in infantry, flight support, and other mechanized combat job functions. Moreover, many combat-trained veterans participated in combat operations. Their particular job focus was military engagement, mission success, and survival. A combat-support veteran also underwent basic military training. However, combat-support jobs include functions such as health care, inventory supply, data processing, finance, and human resource processing. Also, many military combat-support job functions required policy compliance, administrative research, and organizational reporting. Many combat-support functions require information gathering and assessment. It is likely that a veteran whose service functions consisted solely of combat training and engagement would not have the same level of information gathering ability as a combat support veteran whose military responsibilities consisted of administrative research and reporting.

Duty assignment. The final criterion used in the sample selection process was a student veteran's duty assignment. It was expected that a service member's geographic military assignment could play a role in his or her college transition experiences and/or challenges. For example, one might expect a student veteran who was a combat

infantryman to have different service-related experiences from a student veteran with a non-combat duty ESMJ, whose duty assignments did not include combat deployments. Research presented in Chapter II indicated that many combat veterans struggle with traumatic brain injury (TBI) and Post-traumatic stress syndrome (PTSD). The type of college transition experiences could vary between combat and combat-support student veterans. With respect to information about the transition to college, I suspected that college transition information would more likely be available in non-combat duty assignments rather than in a combat assignment. As noted in an earlier section, non-combat assignments ordinarily offered a less threatening environment that would provide opportunities for obtaining information about college enrollment. To help obtain a research sample containing specific sample criteria such as branch of service, gender, race, age, ESMJ, and duty assignment, the study used an additional sampling strategy known as snowball sampling.

Snowball sampling. Hays and Singh (2011) argued that snowball sampling describes a process of research participant recommendations or referrals. Support for using snowball sampling was provided by Merriam (1998) who indicated that snowball sampling is a strategy that asks research participants for referral participants. Merriam (2009) noted that snowball sampling is likely the most used form in purposive sampling. Erlandson et al. (1993) suggested that a first research respondent may participate as a result of his or her prominence in the context of the study, and the first research respondent began the research with his participation in the research process. From that point, in addition to using stratified purposeful sampling to select a diverse group of

participants with distinguishing criteria, a snowball sampling strategy was used to obtain referral participants who offered transition or life experiences that added depth and breadth to the research data. The first respondent participated in that referral and selection process.

Veterans are typically a close-knit community, and after research contact is established, I relied on the "community relationships" of the first participant to identify other potential researcher participants who met stratified sample selection criteria that included branch of service, gender, ethnicity, age, ESMJ, and duty assignment. An example of this type of diversity was a research participant female National Guard student veteran service member who had a chemical/biological/radioactive/ nuclear ESMJ, served in a combat deployment duty assignment, and had children when she entered SFA as a student.

Sample size. As part of the data collection process, an appropriate sample size of student veteran research participants was determined for the study. Hays and Singh (2011) indicated that qualified researchers often debated sample size. Creswell (2007) recommended a sample size of three to five participants for case studies. Sandelowski (1995) indicated that ten participants might be adequate for certain case sampling. Yeh, Inman, Kim, and Okubo (2006) conducted a study on Asian American deaths that occurred during the September 11, 2001, World Trade Center attack and used eleven research participants to evaluate family members' losses and coping strategies. Since one university population was studied, twelve participants were selected for the research sample.

Research participants. As indicated earlier, I used purposeful, stratified, snowball sampling to obtain research participants. I talked to the coordinator of the VRC, and he developed research referral participants that as a group, met the sample diversity I hoped to obtain. As mentioned in an earlier section, those criteria included branch of service, gender, ethnicity, age, ESMJ, and duty assignment. Regarding the student veterans' branch of service, two participants were U. S. Air Force veterans, four were U. S. Army veterans, two served in the U.S. Army National Guard, two were veterans of the Marine Corps, and two served in the Navy. With respect to gender, two study participants were female.

The first was a married woman who served in the U. S. Army National Guard. The second was a U. S. Navy veteran who was also married. Both women were mothers. The participants also represented various ethnic groups. Two were African-American, one was Hispanic, and nine were Caucasian. Ages varied in the group. All were between twenty-three and forty years of age. Military occupation specialties (ESMJ) also varied. Three participants had a combat-designated ESMJ. Nine did not. Six had been deployed in a combat zone; six had not. The data collection process began after participants were selected for the study.

Data collection procedures. With respect to data collection, I have presented sampling steps used to obtain data. To collect meaningful data, Denzin and Lincoln (2005) advocated the use of interviews and focus groups. This study utilized personal interviews and focus groups to collect research data on student veterans' transition issues. As noted by Hays and Singh (2011), individual interviews function as the

primary source of qualitative data collection. Therefore, I used personal interviews as the primary data collection method. Based on individual perspectives I hoped to obtain, this approach was appropriate for the study of veterans' transition to college.

I expected some veterans to feel more comfortable sharing sensitive insights on a one-to-one basis. Moreover, personal interviews allowed individual perspectives to emerge at the beginning of the data collection process. With the conclusion of the data collection interview phase, focus groups were used to filter personal interview data and also function as an interview "safe zone" for student veterans. In that context, I also used focus groups to triangulate data collected from personal interviews. That objective will be discussed later in the chapter. As the first data collection method, personal interviews will be discussed in greater detail.

Interviews as a data collection method. This study used personal interviews as the primary form of data collection. I began the data collection phase by developing individual interview questions. Hays and Singh (2011) noted that interview questions should be designed to extract meaningful responses from research participants. The authors suggested that appropriate types of questions include background or demographic questions, behavior or experience questions, opinion or value questions, knowledge questions, feeling questions, and probing questions. Therefore, the interview questions were not constructed to elicit yes or no responses. Furthermore, to respect participants' experiences and emotions, the interview questions were developed in a sensitive manner. In the context of this study, that meant that standard research questions

were broad and not designed to be emotionally or psychologically invasive. The interview questions are presented in the Appendix A.

Following the development of interview questions, an interview approach was selected. Merriam (1998) suggested that the person-to-person encounter is the most commonly used interview method. As noted earlier, personal interviews served as the first data collection method. With respect to the interviewer/interviewee relationship, Denzin and Lincoln (2005) argued that it is important for researchers to gain trust and establish rapport with research participants.

Many times a bond is instantly created when a veteran becomes aware another person has served in the military. When I introduce myself to student veterans in the VRC, I identify myself as a veteran. As a way to develop relationships, I then ask about their branch of service, ESMJ, and then share my service information with them, continuing to foster a trusting relationship in the interview process. In conversations with student veterans, I only discussed my position at the university to offer help for issues veterans may have. The trust I tried to promote with campus student veterans helped in the personal interview process. To continue that trust and help promote dialog in personal interviews, I used a semi-structured interview question design to guide each interview in the study's data collection process.

In a semi-structured interview context, the researcher serves as interview guide, but the interviewee can interactively establish the structure of the process (Hays & Singh, 2011). Moreover, the semi-structured model allows research participant flexibility to share perspectives about college transition experiences, which may have

begun prior to or during military service. All of the interview participants were current student veterans at SFA, and two graduated in the Spring 2015 semester.

Before the interviews began, I asked participants to meet in the VRC. I explained that as a veteran, my interest in the study was to help veterans who entered college after military service. I also told the participants that my experience was similar to many of their own. We also discussed opportunities to present their concerns as student veterans, with the expectation that student needs identified in the study could continue the national and higher education dialog for other student veterans.

In the interview process, my intent was to strengthen the trust relationship with the participant. The first question I asked was a general background question. Subsequent questions were designed to elicit experiential perspectives relating to the period a veteran was in the military, his or her civilian transition, and his or her college career. As noted earlier, the interview questions are presented in Appendix A.

I scheduled the personal interviews for one hour, and all were completed and concluded at the end of one hour except one. The first interview was very comprehensive; the participant was very enthused and informative, and I did not stop the interview at the end of one hour. The interview concluded at approximately one and one-half hours. All of the personal interviews were tape-recorded with only the participant and researcher present. The written interview transcripts were later developed by my wife, Ethel Gallant, who had been included in the IRB approval process and had completed IRB training. After the personal interviews had been conducted, I collected data from the focus group discussions.

Focus group data collection. In addition to person-to-person interviews, two focus groups were utilized to collect data. The purpose was twofold; confirm the data that had been collected in personal interviews and corroborate the data obtained in the individual interviews. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) suggested that focus groups offer particular insights into critical inquiry possibilities that utilize a deliberative approach connected to real-world problems. Hays and Singh (2011) indicated that a focus group provides opportunities to obtain data from interactive participants who share common experiences. Hays and Singh (2011) further suggested that a focus group's central purpose is to discuss a common topic of interest that can provide insight into perspectives, perceptions, attitudes, and experiences of group participants.

Hays and Singh (2011) also argued that the focus group data collection process provides efficient information, allows a more relaxed feel than individual interviews, and can enhance participant self-exploration. To help stimulate discussion, the focus group target number for the study was between four and six participants. This study used two focus groups to probe deeper into the transition experiences of student veterans using group dynamics to uncover additional research information.

To obtain focus group members, I asked some veterans who had participated in interviews to participate in a focus group. With a target of four to six participants, I selected five members. Three had been deployed in a combat zone and two had not. There were four men and one woman in that session. With that group, I began the discussions by asking what sort of transition issues veterans encountered. From that lead, the participants began to address transition concerns they had experienced or observed.

The second focus group included five members. Those individuals had participated in the first focus group. Some themes I had perceived from personal interviews were affirmed with the first focus group. With the second group, I used thematic-related perspectives I had gleaned from the personal interviews and the first focus group. The research participants were enthusiastic, animated, and many of my thematic perceptions were affirmed. As a researcher, it was interesting to observe and feel the alignment of participant responses. Both focus group sessions lasted approximately one hour. The focus group sessions were tape-recorded, and my wife, Ethel Gallant, transcribed the data. With the conclusion of the data collection in the second focus group, I began the data analysis process.

Data Analysis

Erlandson et al. (1993) indicated that data analysis is a process used to bring meaning and order to data that have been collected. Data analysis is a twofold process that includes data analysis during data collection and further analysis after data collection (Erlandson et al., 1993). The authors described a process called emergent category description that takes units of data and sorts them into categories. Lincoln and Guba (1985) championed this approach, yet cautioned that this technique provides only one of many reality constructions. For this study, the emergent category description approach offered a research opportunity to obtain understanding of the college transition experiences of military veterans. In the data categorization phase, I considered the

process presented by Erlandson et al. (1993) to interpret and categorize the data collected from the personal interviews and focus groups.

Data categorization. Erlandson et al. (1993) suggested the data categorization should proceed as follows:

- Read the first unit of data
- Read the next unit
- Continue until all units have been assigned to categories
- Develop distinguishing category titles or descriptive sentences
- Repeat the process

After I had considered the data-grouping approach presented by Erlandson et al. (1993), I combined that process with a data organization method suggested by Boyaztis (1998). That approach follows:

- Reduce raw data
- Identify themes within subsamples
- Compare themes across subsamples
- Create a code
- Determine the code's reliability

In addition to the data categorization methods I used from Erlandson et al. (1993) and Boyaztis (1998), I also used the theoretical framework components of adult-transition theory and multiple dimensions of identity theory to group data. To organize

the data, I prepared an outline that summarized each participant student veteran's interview. As categories were developed, I placed them within one of the two theoretical framework components.

Theme interpretation and development. From the data categorization process used in the data analysis process, I developed research themes. Again, I used the theoretical framework lens to examine data categories. Through the lens of the theoretical framework, I utilized a coding procedure to examine developed themes from the interpretation categories. I developed codes containing the elements Boyaztis (1998) described as essential:

- Code name
- Theme definition
- Theme description and recognition
- Theme caveats
- Examples of theme searches.

The codes were then placed in groups that emerged as research themes. I developed three themes from the data categories. The importance of research theme development is followed by a process used to help promote data integrity and reliability. A discussion of data integrity and the process used to verify data credibility and trustworthiness will be examined.

Trustworthiness

The qualitative research concept known as trustworthiness guided the process I used to collect and interpret data. Trustworthiness will be discussed in this section in the context of research and further aligned with this particular study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) argued that trustworthiness is a process whereby the findings of an inquiry are appropriate, relevant, and valid. Hays and Singh (2011) indicated that trustworthiness is a process used to provide evidence that research findings are credible and reliable. Merriam (1998) suggested that reliability indicates the level to which research findings can be replicated. She also indicated that internal validity addresses or attempts to address how closely research findings approximate reality. While replicating research findings was not the goal of this analysis, it was essential that this study established student veteran transition data that were valid, credible, reliable, and therefore, trustworthy.

Elements of trustworthiness. Lincoln and Guba (1985) provided elements of naturalistic inquiry that undergird the value and importance of trustworthiness. Those principles were truth value, applicability, consistency, and neutrality. The particular guiding principles selected and the meanings conveyed suggest the essential nature and importance of trustworthiness to those who engage in naturalistic studies. Merriam (2009) also argued that rigorous qualitative research standards or elements promote and validate trustworthiness.

Truth value. The examination of truth value as presented by Lincoln and Guba (1985) begin with a discussion of truth, reality, and the construction of realities. The

authors noted that to develop "true" research designs, the model(s) is dependent on the investigator's ability to establish appropriate controls and assure randomization. Furthermore, Lincoln and Guba (1985) argued that a reliance on controls and randomization followed an assumption of naïve realism supported by rationalization. However, Lincoln and Guba (1985) maintained that the naïve realism assumption is superseded by the assumption of multiple constructed realities. Merriam (1998) pointed out that as qualitative research considers different reality assumptions, practices that support "truth" should align with the qualitative paradigm.

Erlandson, Harris, Skipper and Allen (1993) noted that the naturalistic inquiry process embraces the establishment of shared reality constructions that expand knowledge. Therefore, the authors contended, that in the pursuit of truth value, a researcher should demonstrate the credibility of the adequate representations of multiple reality constructions. In support of that perspective, Merriam (1998) suggested that an underlying assumption of qualitative research is that reality is not a single fixed phenomenon. Rather, the author suggested that it is multidimensional and always changing.

As was expected, a diverse group of student veterans offered many different life experiences that provided various sketches of reality. I approached interview and focus group data collection with an awareness that multiple realities could and frankly, should emerge from research participants during the process. However, constructed realities require validation. The comprehensive aspects of trustworthiness that help provide research validation include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability

(Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In a research context, credibility addresses whether research findings are valid given the collected. Therefore, following data collection, I used a credible data validation process to establish trustworthiness. As a critical aspect of truth value and an essential ingredient of trustworthiness, credibility will be examined.

Credibility. Various scholars utilize different terms to denote a particular element used to attach validity to a study's findings. Credibility is a term offered by Lincoln and Guba (1985) as a substitute for internal validity used in the conventional research paradigm. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that credibility was a sub-set of the truth value component of research trustworthiness. Hays and Singh (2011) indicated that credibility is one of the primary criteria qualitative researchers use to help assure qualitative study conclusions make sense. Credibility is established when an inquiry is conducted in a manner that the probability of valid findings is enhanced. Credibility is further enhanced with the approval of a study's research participants who were the constructors of multiple realities (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) suggested that cogenerated knowledge is considered to be valid if it generates opportunities for action. Suggesting that validity and reliability were synonymous with credibility, Merriam (1998) contended that the terms represent the care and attention to the collection, analysis and interpretation of data, and the way research findings are presented. The process used to establish research credibility and trustworthiness will be discussed in the following section.

Techniques used to promote credibility and trustworthiness. Lincoln and Guba (1985) offered techniques that could be used in a qualitative study to establish

credibility and promote trustworthiness. The first was an activity that offered a likelihood that credible research data and interpretations will result. The elements of that activity include *prolonged engagement, persistent observation,* and *triangulation* (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba (1985) indicated that *prolonged engagement* provided an opportunity to learn the culture of research participants and build trust. I used *prolonged engagement* as the first activity to promote research credibility.

Prolonged engagement. I visited the SFA Veterans Resource Center (VRC) many times before and during the study. Although I had visited the VRC numerous times before I began this study, I visited the VRC on a regular basis during the Fall 2014 semester. I did not visit to "observe" in a research context; I wanted to understand the deeper culture of the VRC. As indicated earlier in the chapter, I became acquainted with the student veterans who visited the center in a relaxed, informal context and was accepted as a part of the "veteran family." As part of the cultural immersion, I attended a ribbon cutting event that recognized a donation to the center and also participated in an evening program that had been designed as a stress reliever for student veterans. The extended engagement and participation in the cultural aspects of the VRC strengthened personal and collective relationships. To continue the study's commitment to trustworthiness, the second technique I used to support credible research data and interpretations was triangulation.

Triangulation. A strategy used to promote credibility and support trustworthiness includes *triangulation* of data methods. Lincoln and Guba (1985) noted that *triangulation* is a technique used to improve the probability that research findings

and data interpretation will be determined credible. Merriam (2009) suggested that *triangulation* is used extensively to strengthen the internal validity of a study. Denzin (1978) indicated that *triangulation* includes the use of multiple data sources, methods, researchers, and theories. Erlandson et al. (1993) noted that *triangulation* is the process whereby information is collected from different sources and points of view that are used to support accumulated research data. In that process, Erlandson et al. (1993) indicated that *triangulation* leads to research credibility.

Merriam (2009) contended that *triangulation* involves a process of cross-checking data that have been collected from different participants in different places, and can include follow-up interviews. Hays and Singh (2011) also suggested that multiple data inquiry methods may provide additional research findings. I used the *methods* concept Lincoln and Guba (1985) offered as the study's *triangulation* component. To triangulate data in the *methods* approach, I had follow-up interviews with some of the student veterans who participated in personal interviews. Also, in casual conversations at the VRC, I asked one of the participants his or her opinion about a research perspective. The student veterans seemed eager to continue research discussions in an informal, relaxed context. Next, I conducted two focus group sessions that were used to triangulate the data. As described earlier, the first group used information obtained from personal interviews. The second group provided deeper clarification of perceptions from the interviews and the first focus group. The use of *prolonged engagement* and *triangulation* allowed the opportunity to utilize the first of the five major techniques that Lincoln and Guba (1985) offered as means of supporting credible research findings and

interpretations. The second major method suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985) to promote credible data was an external inspection of the research process known as *peer debriefing*.

***Peer debriefing*.** Hays and Singh (2011) indicated that *peer debriefing* is the use of an individual(s) associated with the phenomenon of interest. Hays and Singh (2011) also indicated that *peer debriefing* is a reflexive technique and can act as a mirror that reflects the researcher's responses to the study process. Erlandson et al. (1993) indicated that *peer debriefing* helps establish credibility with the use of a professional peer outside of the research context who understands the study and can analyze documents, test hypotheses, and evaluate the researcher's ideas and concerns.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) argued that a peer debriefer questions a researcher, and in the process, evaluates an inquirer's biases, understanding, and interpretation perspective. Erlandson et al. (1993) contended that *peer debriefing* allows a peer professional who understands the study to analyze findings and discuss researcher perspectives. Furthermore, the process can assist a researcher in the development of the methodological design. Finally, debriefing sessions offer an opportunity for a researcher to utilize the peer debriefer as a "sounding board." Rager (2005) argued that in addition to strengthening credibility, *peer debriefing* can also provide emotional support for a researcher. Hays and Singh (2011) further suggested that the individual can be a colleague or one who shared experiences or understanding. I used two peer debriefers in this study.

In the study of veterans' transition to college, a retired military officer who served three combat tours in Iraq participated as a peer debriefer. This particular individual served in the United States Army as an airborne-ranger infantryman. He not only participated in military campaigns but helped direct them as an officer. As a college graduate when he entered the Army, his contribution to my study was outside of the research context and provided a different lens to evaluate student veteran transition issues. Additionally, his leadership positions offered an opportunity to observe veterans in transition situations. As the research participants had, he returned to college after military service. To further support data validation, I used a second peer debriefer who works closely with student veterans and understands their college transition challenges. To further promote research trustworthiness, I used the fifth technique that Lincoln and Guba (1985) called *member checking*. That concept will be presented next.

Member checking. *Member checking*, sometimes referred to as respondent validation, is a process whereby feedback is obtained on emergent findings from research participants (Merriam, 2009). Lincoln and Guba (1985) indicated specific study aspects such as data, research interpretation, and study conclusions are verified with research stakeholders. The authors further noted that *member checking* is the most essential element used to establish credibility. Erlandson et al. (1993) indicated that *member checking* supports credibility by including research participants in tests of data categories, interpretations, and conclusions. Lincoln and Guba (1985) noted that *member checking* can occur on a continuous basis. Hays and Singh (2011) described the process as a continuous feedback loop using research participants to test developing results.

Erlandson et al. (1993) suggested that *member checking* allows stakeholders to test research categories, data interpretations, and research conclusions. The authors further noted that *member checking* may be formal and informal, and it is carried out with respect to the constructions from triangulated data. Erlandson et al. (1993) provided the following *member checking* activities:

- May occur at the end of an interview by summarizing data and asking the participant to correct errors or express concerns about interpretations
- May use interviews to verify interpretations and data obtained in earlier interviews
- May be conducted informally with participant members
- May provide inquiry report to participants and request written or oral feedback on the information contained in the report
- May furnish a complete study to a participant review panel and others involved in the study

This study of veterans' transition to college included *member checking* to help establish an appropriate level of research trustworthiness. The *member checking* process included clarification of research response interpretation from research participants, participants' review of data collection transcripts, follow-up interviews, and focus group interviews to review the research findings. The last *member checking* exercise used five of the personal interview participants to review a set of transition categories and rank them in priority order. The categories included: "student veterans are driven or guided

by"; student veterans have a "strong need to"; and "student veterans need." The participation in that analysis strengthened the data interpretation from personal interviews and focus groups. The final process I used to support research trustworthiness was the use of a reflexive journal.

Reflexive journal. To promote research credibility and trustworthiness, I used a reflexive journal as data were collected through personal interviews and focus groups. Erlandson et al. (1993) indicated that a reflexive journal allows a researcher to document schedules, insights, confirmations, and surprises. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that a reflexive journal offers both methodological and personal insight value. Therefore, I used the journal to enter reflections about the study. As a part of that process, the reflexive journal also functioned as an interactive bridge, connecting the respective contexts within the study's research environment. Moreover, and perhaps most importantly, the journal aligned personal experiential perspectives to insights and observations with the study's data. In that data collection context, the journal provided an opportunity to become a participant in the interviews and focus groups. I also noted certain transition experiences the student veterans encountered were similar to ones I had encountered as a student veteran. The continuation of that journal after the data collection provided a reflective data sounding board that helped support the credibility of the data.

Summary

As the study was concluded, the results validated the use of a qualitative study. Information gleaned from the study, including deep feelings and frustrations about college transition experiences, reflected student veterans' personal insights that would not have been unlocked in a quantitative scientific study. For example, in the study's qualitative approach, most research participants expressed frustrations about age and maturity differences between student veterans and traditional-aged college students. Furthermore, in the study's qualitative approach, the interviews provided research participants the opportunity to voice concerns or perspectives about any college transition concern.

The study process also confirmed that a case study was the appropriate qualitative approach. As Merriam (2002) indicated, a case study's bounded system provides finite qualities that focus a particular study. In that context, time, setting, and the number of research participants serve as case study boundaries. As a research focus, college transition experiences of military veterans who currently attended or graduated from Stephen F. Austin State University since 2007 provided boundaries that allowed a focused research approach. The qualitative case study approach led to the data collection results that are presented next in Chapter IV.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Chapter IV presents the results of this study. As discussed in earlier chapters, a qualitative approach was taken to examine the transition of military veterans to college utilizing a case study as the research methodology. In Chapter IV's analysis, "student veterans" will be used interchangeably with "research participants" and "traditional-aged" college students will describe non-veteran students who are eighteen to twenty-four years of age. To begin data collection, I conducted personal interviews with twelve research participants. The student veterans who participated in personal interviews were Alaina, Angie, Cade, Carl, Gerald, Gill, Jalen, James, Larry, Nick, Tim, and Tom. After the personal interviews were concluded, I held two focus group sessions. Five individuals participated in both focus groups. Those who participated in the first focus group were James, Cade, Tom, Larry, and Alaina. I held the first focus group session the next week that followed the last interview. Data derived from the interviews and the first focus group were transcribed, and I conducted the second focus group session. James, Cade, Tom, Larry, and Alaina also participated in the second focus group. The goal of data trustworthiness was confirmed with the use of focus groups. In a later section, I will present the data from the personal interviews and focus groups.

The broad themes that emerged from the data collection were: Navigation of realigned adult responsibilities; identity transformation and development; and, life purpose expansion through environmental adaptation. The themes were constructed from more expansive data presentation categories. The particular data collection categories

presented in the chapter are: social adjustments; stress; information: uncertainty and the unknown; environmental reconciliation; PTSD; environmental adaptation; identity, sense of purpose; and, sense of belonging. Each of those categories contains specific elements that will be analyzed.

Table 1 following this section presents basic information about the twelve research participants that includes an alias for each participant, military branch, ethnicity, gender, military job category (ESMJ), age, and major duty assignments. All student veterans had stateside training, some had stateside primary duty assignments, others had international duty assignments, and some were deployed in combat zones. Combat zone deployment regions included Bosnia, Iraq presented as Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), and Afghanistan presented as Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). The information categories presented in the table reflect sampling selection criteria discussed in Chapter III. Following the table, Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of participants among the branches of the armed forces. Figure 2 shows their gender distribution. Figure 3 shows the distribution of the participants by ethnicity. Figure 4 presents their distribution by age group, and Figure 5 illustrates the distribution among the various duty assignments. The section that follows the table discusses the research setting at Stephen F. Austin State University and is followed by additional information on the research participants. A summary of study results is analyzed and that summary is followed by the results derived from the personal interviews and focus groups.

Research Participant Information

Table 1. Participant Information

Name	Branch	Gender	Ethnicity	Age	Military Job	Duty Station
Alaina	Navy	Female	White	30	Seabee	Bahrain
Angie	Natl. Guard	Female	White	30	Chem./Radiation	Kosovo
Cade	Marines	Male	White	27	Administration	Germany
Carl	Air Force	Male	White	35	Jet Mechanic	Stateside
Gerald	Air Force	Male	White	29	Weather Frcstr.	Germany
Gill	Army	Male	White	31	Infantry	OIF, OEF
Jalen	Army Rsrv.	Male	Black	24	Supply	Stateside
James	Army	Male	White	40	Infantry	Bosnia
Larry	Navy	Male	White	27	Seabee	OIF, OEF
Nick	Natl. Guard	Male	Black	23	Field Artillery	Stateside
Tim	Marines	Male	White	25	Rifleman	Russia
Tom	Army	Male	White	27	Intelligence	OIF, OEF

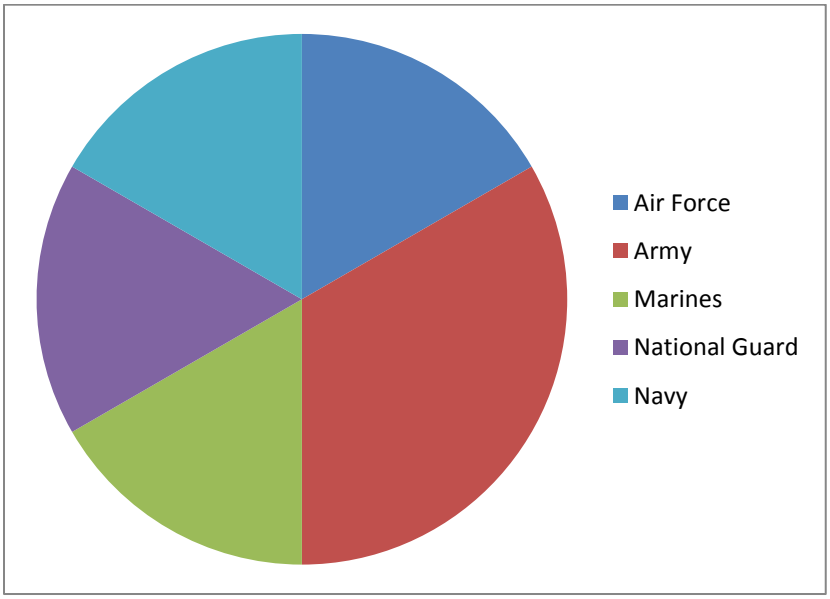

Figure 1. Participant Military Branch

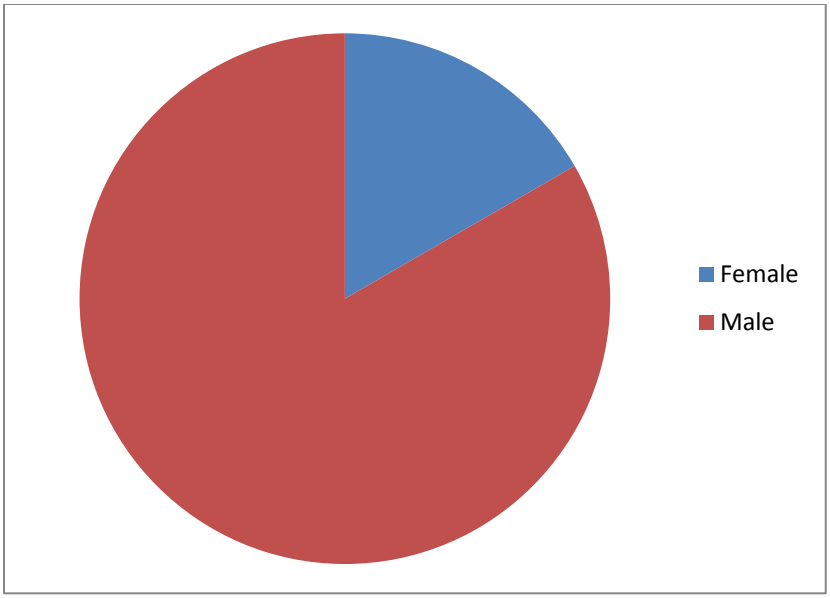

Figure 2. Participant Gender

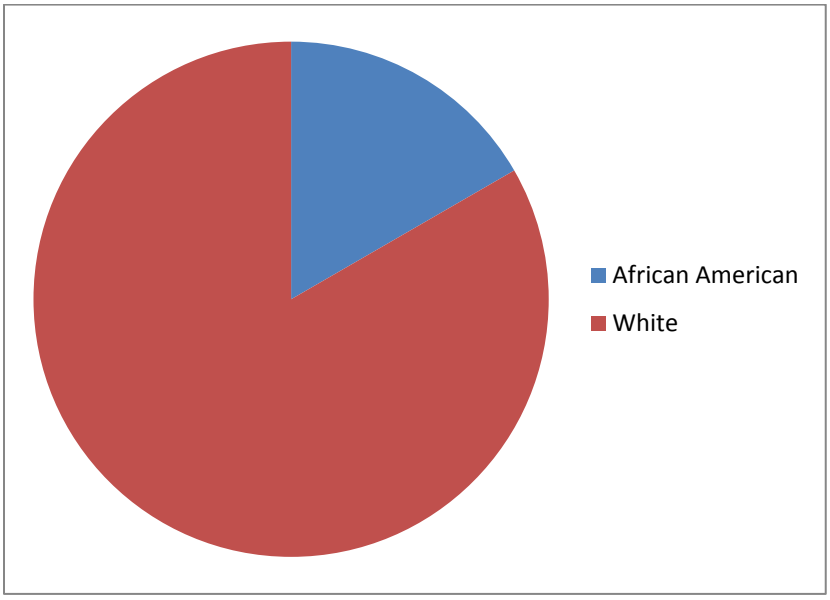

Figure 3. Participant Ethnicity

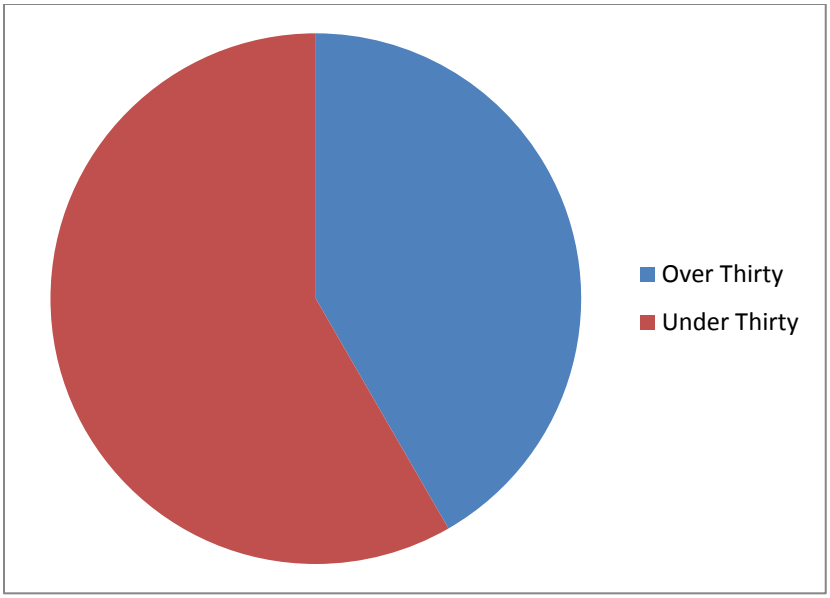

Figure 4. Participant Age

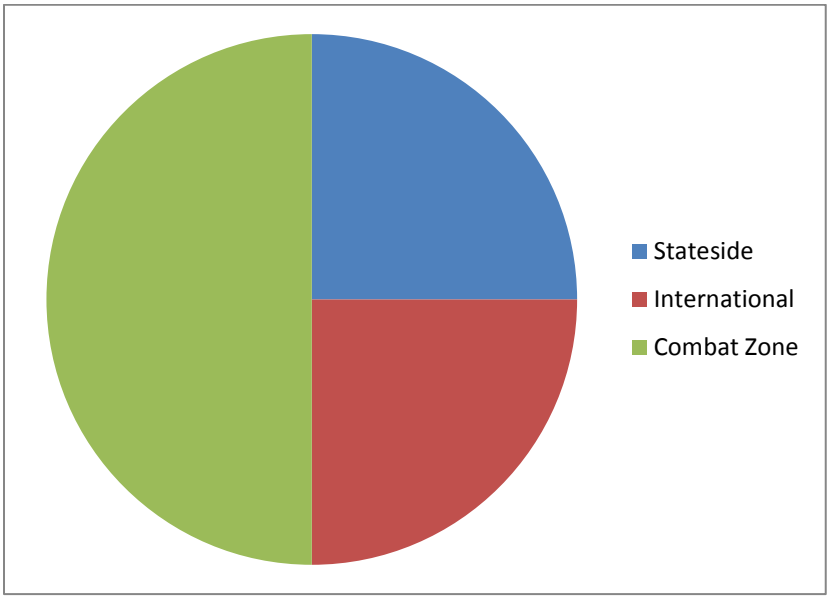

Figure 5. Participant Duty Assignment

Research Setting

As noted in Chapter I, the research setting was on the campus of Stephen F. Austin State University (SFA). SFA is a Texas public institution with an enrollment of approximately 13,000 students. The university is located in the eastern part of Texas, approximately sixty miles from the Louisiana border, approximately 120 miles northeast of Houston, and approximately 150 miles southeast of Dallas. The SFA Veterans Resource Center (VRC) is located in the Baker Pattillo Student Center (BPSC). It comprises approximately 1,300 feet of space.

The VRC has an atmosphere of quiet dignity and professionalism. Different student veterans volunteer and serve in the reception role. The VRC administration reports to the Associate Dean of Student Affairs. The department is supported with university student service fee funding and donations. Numerous veterans visit the VRC, and many people from the East Texas region also support the center. The VRC sponsors volunteer efforts for the local community and promotes fund-raising activities for the center.

In Chapter III, I provided some reasons Stephen F. Austin State University was chosen as a research site for this study. I will restate some of those. First, SFA has a sizeable number of student veterans. The Fall 2014 student veteran population was approximately 1.6% of the study body. Many of the student veterans received Post-9/11 G.I. Bill benefits, some received the Montgomery G.I. Bill benefits, and some were beneficiaries of the Texas Hazlewood tuition and fee exemption program (C. Hardy, personal communication to Danny R. Gallant, April 27, 2015 and B. Williams, personal

communication to Danny R. Gallant, April 28, 2015). I also mentioned in Chapter III that SFA student veterans have a recognized presence in the Nacogdoches, Texas community and actively promote SFA and the SFA Veterans Resource Center.

The VRC works proactively with current military service members and actively with SFA student veterans. SFA was also selected because the SFA Board of Regents strongly supports the SFA Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC) program and student veterans on campus. When student veterans requested the establishment of a Veterans Resource Center, the SFA regents immediately authorized its development. Moreover, the institutional commitment and active VRC engagement enabled the center to leverage a significant amount of donor support for its operations.

Stephen F. Austin State University is also attractive to military veterans because of its nationally recognized commitment to student veterans. The institution was selected by a research group, Military Advanced Education & Transition (MAE&T) as a "TOP SCHOOL." SFA will be included as a top school in the 2016 MAE&T Guide to Colleges and University research study (C. Hardy, personal communication to Danny R. Gallant, October 13, 2015). Furthermore, according to the coordinator of the SFA VRC, many student veterans have East Texas regional ties and many are attracted to a mid-size campus and community where a student veteran presence and commitment exist.

Research Participant Backgrounds

Alaina. A white, thirty year-old female who was a U.S. Navy Seabee and her student veteran husband, Larry, met while in service and were married. They have a

three year old daughter. Alaina is a no-nonsense kind of person. She is quiet and reserved; however, when she speaks, it is with authority and confidence. Alaina is the type of person who simply gets things done without a lot of talking. During her U.S. Navy service, she served in Naval Support Activity Bahrain, a U.S. Navy base, located in the Kingdom of Bahrain. The base is home to the U.S. Naval Forces Central Command and the United States Fifth Fleet.

Alaina's major is criminal justice. Her career goal is to enter law enforcement after she graduates. She and Larry are currently in the process of moving into a new home. Her degree completion goal includes being a role model and setting an academic standard for her daughter. She is committed to her family and wants to use her naval service experience and college degree to enhance opportunities for her family.

Angie. A white, thirty-year old female, Angie is a very unique individual. Angie is a wife, mother of three children, U.S. Army National Guard veteran, and nursing major at SFA. She is also in the ROTC (Reserve Officer Training Corp) at the university. Her ESMJ (job specialty) in the military was Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear Specialist. She spent a year on active duty deployment in Kosovo on a peacekeeping assignment. Before she was stationed in Kosovo, she spent one month in Germany. Angie indicated her Kosovo assignment developed in her an appreciation of the life-style we have as United States citizens.

Angie's intelligence is very apparent in her mannerisms and speech. Her determination is very impressive as that the words "can't" and "lose" are not in her vocabulary. She also leaves the impression that she will stand with anyone in a difficult

situation, but she expects that person to also perform at his or her best. In addition to family and school responsibilities, Angie plans to re-enter in the military as an officer after graduating from SFA with her nursing degree.

Cade. A white, twenty-seven year old student veteran, Cade is a very engaged, conscientious individual. He has strong interpersonal skills and communicates extremely well. He appears to be the kind of person one would turn to get tasks accomplished. Cade is a communications major and expects to graduate in May 2016. He is considering graduate school as well as other options.

Cade leaves the impression that he has an advanced curiosity typically found in very intellectual people. He was an administration specialist in the U.S. Marine Corps. His military service allowed him to grow as an individual. During his U.S. Marine assignment in Europe, he traveled extensively and tried to spend as much time as possible with other cultures, as well as his own group of friends.

Carl. One of the older students who participated in this study, Carl is a thirty-five year old white male. Carl was a jet mechanic in the Air Force and was stationed at Barksdale Air Force Base near Shreveport, Louisiana, when the New York City terrorist attacks occurred on September 11, 2001. Carl was on duty when Air Force One, carrying President George Bush, landed at Barksdale on September 11, 2001.

Carl left the Air Force in 2004 and worked as a mechanic for a number of years. He reached a point where he wanted a satisfying career. He came back to school at SFA and is now a physics major. SFA has recently begun an engineering physics program. Carl expressed an interest in that career direction. Carl gives one the impression of a

man who has examined his life's direction and is now pursuing the solutions he developed. He is quietly confident, and also leaves the impression of one who is very committed and trustworthy.

Gerald. A white male who is twenty-nine years of age, Gerald conveys an intellectual character. He is a tall man who has a dignified military bearing. Gerald is a quiet person who appears to be very analytical in his assessments. Gerald graduated in May 2015 from SFA with a bachelor's degree in environmental science. He will begin graduate school at another state institution in the Fall 2015 semester. He is a person who exudes trust and inspires confidence.

In his military role, Gerald had tremendous responsibility. Gerald's military responsibilities confirm his quiet confidence and calm demeanor. He was a weather forecaster in the U.S. Air Force, and had a duty assignment in Germany. His military responsibilities confirm his character and ability. Gerald normally had a secret security clearance in most of his job assignments. Because of the nature of his work at one duty station, he was also issued a top secret security clearance.

Gill. A white, thirty-one year old male, his ESMJ is infantry. He has seen combat action in both Iraq and Afghanistan. He was wounded as a result of an improvised explosive device (IED) explosion. Gill is a tall, athletic individual. He is dedicated to personal health and fitness. He has a very commanding presence about him. If one were looking for a replacement of Clint Eastwood for a remake of *Heartbreak Ridge*, Gill would serve as a likely candidate.

Gill is a first-generation college student. Many of his family members have served in the military. Gill feels that his family commitment to military service for the United States has set a "high family bar." His goal is to raise the bar even higher. Gill's current major is political science, but he will likely change his major to kinesiology.

Jalen. A twenty-four year old African-American male, he has the military bearing of an individual who is much older. He appears to be a very calm, conscientious person. Jalen is also a first-generation college student. He has been interested in the military since he was young. During high school, he was in the Junior Reserved Officers Training (JROTC) program. He became military-oriented as a result of that program. In addition to being interested in the military, Jalen wanted to attend college. He enlisted in the U.S. Army reserves in order to help pay for college and has served for seven years. Jalen's ESMJ is supply.

That particular job specialty is in the quartermaster branch of the Army. In that component, supply specialists maintain inventories of military goods and are responsible for issuing different types of equipment, clothing, or other articles to army personnel. He leaves the impression that he is very reliable and detailed in his military inventory management role. Jalen appears to be the type of person who is grateful for the opportunities he has and takes advantage of opportunities by performing to the best of his ability. He recognizes the importance of the educational benefits provided by military service, intends to continue his military service with honor, and leverage his future career. Jalen leaves the impression that he is a man of his word. If he makes a commitment, he will follow it through. He also seems to be the kind of individual who

would volunteer to serve in any capacity where he was needed, and perform that responsibility with distinction.

James. A forty-year old white male, James was a U.S. Army infantry Airborne Ranger. In that capacity, he was one of the most highly trained special operations military service members in the world. James could be described as a warrior's warrior. He was deployed in a combat theater in Bosnia. James is a mission-driven individual. He is passionate about his and other student veterans' higher education success. He is noted for accomplishing things quickly, efficiently, and proficiently. One could visualize James as a military service member planting a victory flag on the top of a hill just taken by U.S. military forces.

James's warrior ethos has been channeled into a passion for service. He is committed to helping veterans become successful at Stephen F. Austin State University. He is an advocate for veterans' causes and attends every SFA graduation to congratulate the student veterans who have completed their degrees. James graduated from SFA in December 2011 with a bachelor's degree in Rehabilitation Services and Psychology, and expects to complete his master's degree in May 2016.

Larry. A twenty-seven year old white male, he is a remarkable individual. Larry is a U.S. Navy veteran who served four combat tours. He was deployed in both Iraq and Afghanistan. His military job was a Seabee. Navy Seabees are combat engineers. Larry was wounded in combat, and is now 100% disabled. Larry is a very strong, rugged individual. He is what "old-schoolers" would call a man's man. He is the kind of person one knows he or she can rely on. He is loyal to a fault and prides himself on being

trustworthy and dependable. He doesn't mince words. He says what he means and means what he says.

Larry is married to Alaina and they have a daughter who is three years old. His daughter is the pride of his life. In fact, Larry's primary desire to obtain a college degree is to set an education example for his daughter. She is one of the main reasons he stands against the lingering effects of PTSD. Larry's major is criminal justice. His minor is forestry.

Nick. An African-American, twenty-three year old male, he comes from a military family. His father, grandfather, and other relatives have all served in the military. He had an interest in the military for some time, and his father advised him to get a college degree and enter the military as an officer. After attending SFA, Nick felt he should enter the Army National Guard (NG) and, after training, re-enroll at the university. He completed NG training requirements and came back to SFA.

Nick is a very polished, poised individual. He has strong interpersonal skills and communicates very well. Nick appears very balanced and adjusted in managing his dual military reserves and student roles. Nick appears to have a strong service perspective. He is very engaged with certain student activities on campus. He enjoys working within student groups on campus.

Tim. A twenty-five year old white male, he had a very interesting military assignment. He was trained as an infantry rifleman in the U.S. Marine Corps and spent three years as an embassy guard in Moscow, Russia. He was later part of a Marines unit that had a brief, two-month assignment in Iraq. He and others questioned the reason for

the brief Iraq deployment because his unit had been training for Afghanistan for an extended period of time.

Tim appears to have a no-nonsense kind of personality. He seems to be a disciplined individual. One could imagine the discipline, trust, and security clearance that is required of an embassy guard in Moscow. Tim leaves the impression that he is a pragmatist and has little tolerance for idealism. He is a psychology major and wants to pursue a career in federal law enforcement.

Tom. A twenty-seven year old white male, he was an intelligence analyst in the U.S. Army with deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan. Tom is a very mattter-of-fact individual. Tom appears to be very intelligent, and he leaves the impression he has little patience for those who are incompetent or unreliable. One could presume Tom knew Army regulations extremely well and followed them explicitly. His speech is very direct, with little or no elaboration. Tom is a disciplined fitness proponent. He gets up around 5:00 each morning and works out at the gym.

Tom's major was criminal justice. He graduated in May 2015 but chose not to participate in the graduation ceremony. He is interested in a career in law enforcement. He has expressed an interest in working for a federal law enforcement agency but is also considering applying to the Houston Police Department. Tom has also applied for U.S. Naval Officer Candidate School (OCS).

Study Results

The next section of Chapter IV analyzes the data collected from personal interviews and focus groups. Twelve personal interviews were conducted for primary data collection purposes. An initial focus group session was conducted to help triangulate personal interview data, and a second focus group was used to expand on themes that emerged from the interviews and first focus group. The data collected in the study were arranged into broad categories that contain sub-components. The following expands on that process.

In Chapter III, I presented the data categorization and thematic development approaches suggested by Erlandson et al. (1993) and Boyaztis (1998). Those approaches were used to analyse and categorize data from personal semi-structured interviews. Following the guide provided by the authors, I read all units of data from personal interviews, developed descriptive categories, and assigned data to categories. Moreover, I also examined the data using the theoretical framework component lenses of adult-transition theory and multiple dimensions of identity theory. In some cases, certain data elements overlapped into multiple data categories. As an example, data regarding age differences between student veterans and traditional-aged students was considered relevant in both theoretical framework components. Similarly, “age differences data” could be placed in both “age differences” and “identity formation” categories.

Following the focus group data transcription, I examined and compared those data with the comprehensive personal interview data categorizations. Essentially, the focus group data confirmed and validated the personal interview data categories and

respective elements within those categories. Some data elements obtained in the personal interviews were also expanded more descriptively. As an expansion example, focus group data suggested that post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) be characterized as post-traumatic stress, rather than a disorder.

Using a similar approach to develop themes, I used the comprehensive personal interview and focus group data categorization to develop broad thematic perspectives. Again, I used the theoretical framework components of adult-transition theory and multiple dimensions of identity theory to examine themes and sub-themes. I then aligned the study's themes and sub-themes will the respective theoretical framework components. Appendix B presents the study's themes and sub-categories. The first data category to be analysed is presented as "Social Adjustments."

Social Adjustments

The student veteran interviews and focus group data collection examined various types of transition issues that student veterans encountered. One of the significant social adjustments for student veterans is entering a college environment wherein differences exist between the student veteran population and the traditional-aged student population. Most traditional-aged students entered higher education upon graduation from high school and are first time freshmen. SFA has a strong freshman experience culture. Many student and social activities are geared toward campus resident students. Many student veterans who were interviewed in this study indicated that age differences, maturity levels, and life experiences created transition challenges.

Age Differences

Most of the student veterans who participated in this study had served in the military after September 11, 2001, which meant they were eligible for the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill (PGIB). The youngest student veteran who participated in the study was twenty-three years old. Therefore, all of the student veterans were at least five years older than the traditional eighteen-year old freshman college student. Most research participants were in their twenties. One was thirty-five years of age and one was forty years of age. One of the transition challenges mentioned most often by student veteran participants was the age difference between student veterans and the traditional student population. Many student veterans were bothered by what they described as immaturity and parental dependence in traditional-aged college students.

The age difference in most student veterans and most traditional-aged students was emphasized by Angie in her personal interview. She indicated that her age caused her to deliberate whether or not to enter college. She stated:

> When I was completely out [of the military], it took forever for me to [enter a four year school]. . . . I didn't want to go, or either I was actually scared I wouldn't fit in. I was already too old; I had done too much stuff; it wasn't going to be for me.

As noted earlier, Angie is thirty years old, married with three children, and is a nursing major. As she mentioned, her age and family responsibilities separate her

socially from most college students. She further noted that she struggled with the reality of being an older student in college. She expressed that perspective in the following way:

> I mean it's weird. At first, when I first started, I didn't belong, or I feel like I did not belong at all . . . I was older. I was like, I felt like I should have already done this, and because I didn't already do it, I kind of missed out and I shouldn't be trying to catch up. It was even now, a little bit; being a decade older than most people in the same program; it still is playing catch up because they did it right out of high school, and they're coming in, and I have three kids and married and catching up from so far behind.

Angie also acknowledged the age differences and maturity levels between student veterans and traditional-aged students. She stated: "I think the hardest thing about coming to college was . . . we're older. We have a kid. So we got to find somewhere where we're surrounded by kids."

Tim also expressed concern about the age and relationship differences between student veterans and traditional-aged students. Tim is twenty-five years old. He described the eighteen, nineteen, and twenty-year old students as kids. He stated: "These kids are just that; kids. Eighteen, nineteen, twenty-year olds; kids; cause the rest of us are older. I just turned twenty-five and I'm in my second year of school now." He noted that when he first enrolled, ". . . it sounded like I was going to get classes grouped in

with people of my own age, But I found out after my first semester, that didn't happen at all."

Gerald also expressed some frustrations about age differences between student veterans and traditional-aged students. He elaborated: [That] "if you just go to the library or something . . . you're seven years older than everyone; been through all these things . . . trying to relate to the average person."

Gill also commented on the age differences between student veterans and younger students. As noted earlier, Gill is thirty one years old. He remarked that he had been asked how old he was and why he was in college. He indicated that he would "quickly just turn the question back to them and asked why you are here." He said he guessed the "new generation coming through . . . believes that college is supposed to be their thing; that if you didn't graduate at their era, you shouldn't be here or something. I don't know; I don't know what their thoughts are behind it." When I asked Gill about the significance of age differences between student veterans and traditional-aged college students, he replied: "I think it's an age thing because I know back when I was graduating from high school, we didn't have smart cell phones. You were lucky if you got internet access, and you had to be hooked up to the wall for internet. You couldn't just walk around and do it."

Carl also commented on the age differences between student veterans and traditional-aged students. He further indicated that student veterans' military background added to his age difference concerns. When asked what college challenges he had encountered, he stated:

> I think, well, I think being surrounded by so many people that are so much younger than myself. And it's not that they're bad people, there are a lot of good people here. They're just, you know, thirteen, fourteen years younger than me, you know; and so we're a different generation.

Cade noted that it is a challenge to transition into college and see a group of "youngsters" who have about the same level of personal wealth as he does at his age. He seemed concerned that he should now be at a different income and success level in life. He suggested that he considers his peer group to be those of his own age. He noted that he has:

> …the title of SFA student, and there are lots of people that are ten years my younger that have the same title. So it's like my challenge is: do I compare myself to them? Where do I match up in comparison to my peers; and let alone the people I actually grew up with? . . . That's kind of a personal challenge where am I in comparison to everyone else.

James also commented on a transition issue that relates to the age differences between student veterans and younger students. He stated: "For a lot of veterans…raising your hand can be one of the hardest things to do within a classroom of eighteen, nineteen, or twenty-year olds. For a veteran that has so much experience to not know something; to come to the civilian world and be lost is scary." James further elaborated on the age difference between student veterans and traditional-aged students and suggested how it made him feel out of place. He stated:

> Yeah, I think there's one big point that I think myself and others have a problem with, and that's being a mature veteran that has seen so much and has so much experience, and then you get thrown in a classroom with professional students. They've been through school thirteen years straight. They're eighteen years old, and they're good at college. They're good at sitting in a classroom. That's what made me feel so awkward; that's where I felt like a fraud because I didn't feel like I was good enough. I didn't consider myself a student until probably the very end of my senior year, cause at that point, I was thinking, OK, I can do this.

Maturity

When asked about other transition challenges, in addition to age differences, some student veterans voiced concerns about traditional-aged student immaturity. Most research participants expressed a significant maturity-level gap between student veterans and traditional-aged students. Student veterans maintain they are adults who choose to be in college because they feel a responsibility to obtain a degree and improve their life and family standing.

Angie indicated that when she first entered college, traditional-aged students wanted her to go out and "party with them," but she simply had no interest because the "maturity level was not there." She thought about joining a sorority to connect with other students and described that consideration in the following way:

> They had their rush week where there was a whole bunch of different groups trying to recruit people, and I walked through there, [and thought]maybe I could do that, or maybe I could do that, and you had the sororities trying to . . . you know, you want to go Greek and this and that. . . . I had that slight thought where, well, maybe I could do that. That might be kind of fun; and then it was, . . . wait a minute. I'm too old for this. You know I'm too mature for this . . . and, no thank you, I'm gonna pass.

Angie also expressed frustrations about maturity differences between student veterans and traditional-aged students who are in the college ROTC (Reserve Officer Training Corps) program. She contrasted student veteran and traditional-aged student cadets in the following way:

> I'm also in the ROTC program and with that you can look at the kids with no military background; they're just doing the program to commission in. And then you can see the people that are vets; that are coming to do the program . . . the mission. And it's different. We're there for a purpose. We're there to get our commission. And the rest of everybody is distracted with who's wearing what, or who's doing what.

Angie also talked about the differences in her approach to her academic classes. She noted:

> Even in other classes, I can go in there and listen. I get my notes. I complete whatever tasks, and everybody else is talking on their phones and missed whatever was said. . . . So I think a lot of it, probably 90% of it was the military; . . . and the other 10% might be having three kids. Being able to know what they're doing over here, yet still get by. *Mission accomplished* [emphasis added].

Gill noted the difference in maturity levels and provided some perspective about the differences. He commented on how student veterans take their academic responsibilities very seriously. He contrasted that perspective with some traditional-aged students when he stated:

> Vets . . . when we're in class, that's what we're there to do. A lot of these kids I'm in class with; they treat it as their social hour. They are gossiping during class, or they have to be on their computer looking through Facebook or Twitter, or Pinterest, or whatever social media is out there for them to look at. They're doing that more, instead of where I'm trying to actually focus, cause that's pretty much what you're supposed to be doing, whether it's fifty minutes, an hour and fifteen, or however long; that's what you do.

Gill elaborated further. He stated:

> A traditional college student just seems like they're still sheltered. It's their first time they've been away from their parents, but they're still being given everything. Veteran students, yeah, we're being given our education, thanks to Uncle Sam; but I don't think a lot of people realize what we had to go through to get that, you know.

Jalen also talked about his perceptions of the different maturity levels between student veterans and traditional-aged students. When asked about the differences, his thoughts were:

> Definitely. . . .You know some students came, you know, just because their parents . . . forced them. . . . But you know, you definitely notice that in class, you see people complaining, you know, left and right . . . But I just decided, you know, that I would sit back, you know, and I will let them do what they needed to do. I came to college to get a career, and at this point in time, I'm gonna worry about myself. I'm not gonna try to teach someone else . . . how they should be acting.

James also discussed the challenges of being around younger students who sometimes seemed to him to be either immature or irresponsible. His comments suggested his perceptions about the maturity and responsibility differences between a student veteran and traditional-aged student. James expressed his frustration in the following way:

> I'm not like a lot of students around here at campus whining; did I get the latest smart phone? My parents don't give me my allowance. As a mature veteran coming to school I have to pay for my truck note, gas, my insurance, my electricity bill. I have to think about, where is my retirement going to be?

Nick discussed maturity as one of the major concerns about differences between traditional-aged college students and student veterans. Nick appeared to suggest there were levels of seriousness, reality awareness, and personal responsibility differences between student veterans and traditional-aged students. When asked what he felt were differences between traditional-aged students and student veterans, he described his perspective in the following way:

> A big difference. A big difference. Naturally, we're more, more focused, more like, how do I say it? . . . A lot more structured, of course. It's more of a maturity deal, you know. It's not the bright-eyed, you know, big dream college student coming in. It's somebody who's kind of focused; like, okay, I'm coming in here, I know what I need to do. I have that in mind. I have agendas on how to get this done. And, it's a focus issue.

The follow-up question was whether he viewed college as a mission. He responded: "Yep, definitely. That's how I look at it. This is my mission. I'm here to graduate and I need to do these things in order to graduate."

Alaina was also concerned with the maturity level of traditional-aged students. She contrasted her perceptions and concerns with the maturity-level differences between traditional-aged college students and student veterans.

> I think also coming from a military background, it matures you. It makes you grow up. It turns you into adults. I think that by us waiting to come back to school, we are more focused. We have that mindset. Well, this is what I need to do. This is what I have to get done. This is how much time I have to do it. Most of us who are on the GI bill only have three years. The GI bill only pays for 36 months of school.

Tim indicated the maturity level of traditional-aged students bothered him as well. He observed what he considered to be immature behavior in younger students. It appeared to be a distraction. He specifically noted:

> I've seen people come to class hung over, and I'm like, why bother to come to class then? It's like if you're not here to learn, why bother to come to class? Why are you going to sit there and play on your phone? And stuff like that; it's really irritating to me. I see people all the time playing on their phone; they're either hung over or whatever; they're not there to learn.

Gerald was another research participant who was bothered by immaturity and responsibility levels that he attributed to age differences between student veterans and

younger students. He noted that at the beginning of one semester he overheard a conversation between two first-semester freshmen girls before class. He stated:

> There were these two girls in front of me waiting for class to start; girls, like, "oh my gosh, this is my first semester, and I got an 8:00 a.m. class and I have to have class on Fridays. It's so hard." And I was like, "Are you serious?" I mean, I had two jobs working one hundred hours a week.

He also stated that it was "tiring" to be around that same kind of mentality. He expressed additional concerns about traditional-aged students' maturity:

> It boggles my mind how many people are so cavalier about coming to class. In the military, you don't have a choice. You can't skip work . . . the police come looking for you. The only way you don't go to work is if you go to sick call if you are really sick, or if you have someone trusted, that you can tell to call in sick. And you're not going to stroll in five minutes late; you get your butt to class.

Tom noted his perceptions of how professors often interact with younger non-veteran students. He expressed the difference of working with student veterans and traditional-aged students. He stated that: "[Faculty] don't need to explain things to me five times like I'm a child, like a lot of these people in my class. Come on guys, big boy talk." He further elaborated:

> Like these professors all talking to us like children; it's because they literally are children there, so, a lot of people I know, and it's also a reason why veterans I think don't come back to school or finish it out because they're not willing to get past the first year or two to get to their upper-level classes, so the professors will start talking to them like they're adults. That's the way I see it, and it's different, a lot to do with maturity level.

Tom offered an example of traditional-aged student immaturity. He described a situation that occurred in one of his classes.

> Last semester I was in a Spanish communication class; this dude, young African-American male, walked in and he was just standing there in class. Like, we're all looking at him. He was just standing there. Looked like he was high, and he was like, "Oh, I left my keys in here." Like, in the middle of class, he couldn't wait till the end of it; like, me and there was another veteran beside me. We were shocked to begin with. We were shocked, and we were instantly enraged, and like we didn't know what was going on, and then he just kind of walked out of class.

Angie made another distinction about her perceptions of student veterans and traditional-aged students. She expressed her thoughts in the following way:

> But as for me, I feel like I could sit in the classroom, and you could look around and see who's older, and then you can kind of tell if they're a vet or not, the way they sit, the way they pay attention. They're not sleeping in class, or playing on their cell phones, or just blankly staring at the professor. They are trying to get their education and trying to learn because they've worked to get into college.

In a focus group, one student veteran described the difference in maturity levels between student veterans and non-veterans. The individual stated:

> I say almost every person on this campus is at a kid's level of maturity compared to what we had to learn and what we had to go through; what they worry about day to day doesn't even compare to the things we've had to worry about. And for me, that's some of the hardest stuff to relate to with all these people on campus.

The perceived maturity level differences leads to the next section that analyzes research participants' perceptions of life experience differences between student veterans and traditional-aged students. The data reflect different types of military experiences that include specialized training, combat, international travel, and cultural enrichment.

Life Experiences

Another concern that student veterans note is the exchange of colorful life experiences for a much simpler college life environment. In addition to age and maturity

differences between traditional-aged students themselves, student veterans note their life experiences greatly exceed those of younger non-veterans students. This appears to be a major transition item with student veterans. Student veterans feel they have lived aspects of life that younger students simply cannot fathom. With that perspective, student veterans generally do not socialize with younger non-veteran students. Most research participants saw their job responsibilities, travel, and specific experiences as life-defining events. Cade described the travel aspect of his military life experiences. He noted:

> I was in the military and got to travel around and meet different people. . . .I was lucky enough to go and meet people that were from all over the world. So that's one thing that I see that's different; . . . and it's kind of, I want to say, old man mentality; the kind of been there, done that kind of mentality.

Gerald expressed some frustration about the responsibility levels he had in the military and the lack of that recognition in college. Most of his service required a secret security clearance, and he was on a later assignment that required a top secret security clearance. He contrasted his military experiences and responsibility levels with those of a college student:

> I guess one of the other challenges is trust, I guess. That; . . . in the military, I had clearance, and I'm working on all these huge briefs, secret missions, and I mean, people would look over my stuff, but people really

> trusted me, you know. I did my job pretty well, and because [it was] top secret stuff. And then I get here and, well, we don't know if we can trust you. . . . I had knee surgery, and I had to take a make-up test, and I came in early to take it, and the lady was like, make sure you don't tell anybody . . . [Frustrated]. And just all these things; we don't know if we can trust you. I was like, oh my God, what happened? A few months ago [the military] trusted me with national security stuff and now it's like you can't trust me with test questions.

Tim also had a life opportunity at the age when most college bound students are actually attending college. When asked of his transition to college from the military he noted his service role: "From 2010 to 2013 I was overseas on a Marine Corps security guard program…guarded the [United States embassy in Moscow, Russia]. As he noted in his discussion, Tim believed his Iraq deployment was related to an organizational military agenda.

Tim further pointed out who he felt about traditional-aged students. He stated:

> I really don't associate with people in my classes. I just don't really care to. From class discussions we had, it's just like I'm the only one; it seems like I'm the only one with real world experience. I just try not to associate with them. I just come over here [Veterans Resource Center] and chill out. Tell my stories and talk with people around here.

Tim had an additional perspective about his tolerance of traditional-aged students. He mentioned a film that was shown in a political science class. Tim indicated the film had to do with leadership and a particular football coach's soft leadership approach. The class discussed a tough leadership style. Tim expressed his concerns with the class's disapproval of a tough leadership style in the following way:

> [Class] "Oh, the football coach doesn't do that to his guys, and they still work together as a team." [Tim] It's like, no, it doesn't work like that. They have a football team to mess up the big game and try again tomorrow. In the military, you mess up and it could be someone's life. So it's got to be hard, you got to be able to make the whole mental breakdown thing; and they try to push past that, the whole mental breakdown thing. And I remember, just looking around class, and "has anyone ever . . . anybody . . . oh me, they have no idea what you're talking about." Then, they're looking at me all mad. And I'm like, I don't care, look at me mad all you want. You have no idea what you're talking about, so just shut up.

As noted earlier, Angie's military job was a chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear specialist. She was deployed to a peacekeeping assignment after a month-long pre-deployment training period in Germany. When asked to describe her military life, she expressed her experiences in Kosovo in the following way:

> [Life's experiences and dealing with life's issues] I think living in Kosovo for a year, which was a third world country. They didn't even have a bathroom; it was a hole in the floor; literally, a hole in the floor; very difficult if you were not a male. But, I mean, seeing how these people live through that, and they go about their day like it's perfectly normal. And I mean all the hardships they had to deal with, the hardships I had to deal with; I was spit [sic] on numerous times. Mainly from the older Albanian women; and I guess they were, I mean the Muslim religion and that's just not their thing. They don't do that, so I guess; and it was only me and another female. The males, they were kind of accepted. The female soldiers, they just were not accepted. So we did get spit [sic] on quite a bit. But doing all of that, I can come back here and say, "Well, I have it pretty good now." I mean, even if I am paycheck to paycheck and barely making it. I have it really good compared to what they had. And if I can get through a year of living like that, I can get through anything. I think that helps a lot.

Gill has served on active duty in the U.S. Army and in an Army National Guard reserve component more than ten years. He is a non-commissioned officer and has had deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan. Gill experienced one of the horrors of war. The vehicle he and a "buddy" were traveling in was "blown up" by an enemy Improvised Explosive Device (IED). Gill suffered injuries to his arm, and his friend lost a leg.

In the interview, we discussed the differences between being a college student in a peaceful environment in the United States and being a combat soldier in a foreign country. I mentioned a story a student combat veteran had shared about military-life experiences and traditional college-life experiences. I indicated the student veteran contrasted military and college life spring break experiences by stating that he had "spent his spring break in Fallujah." Gill nodded knowingly and shared a story that contrasted life experiences of student veterans and traditional-aged college students. He told SFA college students about "turning twenty-one" in Iraq. He stated:

> I did that to a couple of kids here. They were talking about what they were going to do for their twenty-first birthday cause it's this week and stuff like that; where they want to go, what they're going to drink, and whatever, you know; what their plans are gonna be. [As an experiential contrast] And I'm like, "Hey, you ever had a non-alcohol beer? To celebrate a birthday? Cause I was in Ramadi, Iraq for my twenty-first birthday, so that's where I celebrated."

Gill summarized the contrasts of his life experiences with traditional-aged students by stating: "I've been places and done things they haven't. I've been out in the world and explored and haven't been coddled the whole time."

Carl was a jet mechanic in the U.S. Air Force and was stationed at an Air Force base where Air Force One landed after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. In addition to being a military service member during that traumatic national event, he

provided a significant experiential life difference between student veterans and younger non-veteran students. Carl elaborated:

> Because you talk about being in a war zone, or you can talk about, you know, road side bombs, and these people [students] don't understand. They don't get it. They can't even imagine that. They can't imagine loading bombs on a bomber; . . . for a war to blow up someone's country. They don't know.

James's military experiences were significant for a young man who entered the U.S. Army as an eighteen year old. He believes his military service will be the high point of his life. James indicated that he did "extreme infantry work, special operations, and so I was used to taking on more than what the skill of the job required. You had to always continue to learn in the military." James offered a perspective about military service that helps create a unique visualization. He indicated that young enlisted men and women, typically in a life period between eighteen to twenty-four years old, had significant life experiences while they were teenagers. James described the experiences in the following way:

> We have our most colorful and vivid career we will ever have. . . . So it's hard. . . . it's living your life in reverse. And most people don't realize that we grow up in reverse. I graduated from high school and went into the most colorful and vivid career that I will ever have done, and then you have to come back and start from grass roots.

Military Experiences

As part of their travel experiences, some student veterans were engaged in combat during their military duty. The horrific nature of combat has left some veterans with lingering issues that challenge their successful transition to college. The research participants discussed how both combat and combat support service influenced their initial and ongoing transition to college. At a very young age, many military service members encounter dark and extreme life experiences. Larry had four combat deployments. He discussed some of his combat experiences and their lingering impact on his transition to college.

> I was blown up right before Christmas on the 24th; lost two guys. Both of them had two kids and we had to call their wives to let them know they were not coming home no more. Daddy didn't make it. Not knowing how they're going to take it. It makes you that much more, makes you, that much more numb. And it's hard to come out of that numbness.

During a focus group session, research participants discussed combat experiences and the challenges of moving from there into a college life environment. In that analysis, they contrasted the combat experience with the later college experience. Both described combat as an experience that heightened physical and mental senses. One described the combat experience in the following way:

> It's like being on drugs. It's the biggest high you'll ever be on. And what comes of that is such hyper-awareness of sights, smells, sounds, stresses and anxieties of doing that . . . I didn't know which way was up at some points. And for a lot of reasons, I think that kept us alive. Yeah, you bring home anger, rage, and I think for combat veterans it's tough in being in such a soft environment [college]. That's a good way of saying it.

A second focus group participant described the "letdown" as the loss of that "euphoric feeling." He elaborated further:

> You get to a point where you start coming down when you get back to . . . society. You don't have your weapon, you don't know your comrades; you go through a state of almost like a depression and you turn to other things to relinquish [sic].

The adrenalin "rush" that takes place is the body's change in stress, hormone, and adrenalin levels. These act as catalysts to heighten sensitivity in extreme physical conditions. A U.S. Marine Vietnam combat veteran indicated that "for a young man, physical and emotional sensations that result from combat are like sex." When veterans leave a combat environment, the loss of that combat-induced exhilaration often is a contributor to PTSD (Hoge, 2010). The author also noted the removal or loss of those types of experiences can lead to depression, anxiety and anger.

A focus group participant continued with his contrast of his combat experiences and the college life he is now a part of. He indicated:

> You miss it. [You wonder] if you're ever gonna get back there. You know, if you have a high point in your life and that's your peak. No one wants to peak. Everyone wants to keep going and keep rising. And this is what I take from hearing combat veterans; it's like they get taken back there . . . the senses . . . it's like it's seared into their brain, you know when you smell something and it takes you back. Not to say you want to get back to that, but you want to know, "Am I ever gonna get either to it or above that feeling?" I know young men go into combat zones to war and things like that at nineteen years old. Their highest climax . . . it's like, now I get to spend the rest, the forty years I have left on this earth, just reliving that event whenever I was nineteen, or twenty, twenty-one.

James also noted that his combat experiences left him with an acute sense of vulnerability in a college environment. He indicated that he was extremely anxious in crowded environments. He explained that his experiences that led to "hyper-awareness" caused undue concerns and distracted him in crowds. I asked him to describe his concerns. He stated:

> Crowds, congestion itself. Being in small classrooms with forty people; people talking behind you, people walking behind you; testing was very difficult for me. I would evaluate [distractions and losing focus] as very stressful and anxiety ridden because I was looking at [others] the small of the back, the waistline, the ankles. I was looking for a weapon every time

someone was getting up . . . making sure I had appropriate exit strategies. Where are my exit points?

The life experiences of a combat veteran appear to include transition aspects that are in some ways different from combat support veterans, although training and combat zone deployment lead to sensitivities for both types of former service members. Combat veterans live with transition issues that combat support veterans may not have. For example, one student veteran in the second focus group session stated that "the actual combat patriot that's on campus now probably has more awareness. He or she is going to do recon [sic], due diligence on the community, the environment, the surroundings, even though he might not understand what the environment really is--that being the academic world." He further indicated, however, that both combat and combat support veterans will have environmental sensitivity; "[combat veterans] just gonna maybe, quite possibly have more."

However, participant combat support service members in combat zones were involved in mortar and bomb attacks levied against military bases. Group members discussed the bombings and mortar attacks that occurred on military bases. One research participant described his feelings in the following way:

> I believe the non-combat student will have some of the hyper-sensitivities. They're going to have it; [although] not everybody is going to throw lead down range or be shot at; or, I mean, in these words, the current ones in Iraq and Afghanistan, nine times out of 10, there's [sic]

> mortar rounds coming down around you. . . . There are IEDs (Improvised Explosive Devices) all around you. So you don't have to have a combat MOS (Military Occupational Specialty) to be in harm's way.

As presented earlier, Nick is a current service member in the National Guard. His interview led to an examination of different veteran experiences when I asked if some veterans felt isolated. He offered his view on combat and combat support veterans as follows:

> [Student veteran isolation] Naturally, yes, I do because not me per se, but my experiences are not the same as someone that did a combat tour in Afghanistan, and depending on location, they may have seen a lot, and they don't really know how to cope with being around people like that . . . social.

Stress

Adult Responsibilities

Financial concerns. Student veterans who enter college have served in a former military active duty status or currently serve in a reserve capacity. Their military financial support level was based on factors such as rank, time in service, and the service members' active or reserve status. Depending on these factors, the service members relied on a predictable level of military financial support. That support was in addition to many living expenses that were provided, such as health and dental care, insurance, food

and housing. As student veterans, financial support and living expenses often change significantly. In this study, some students used Montgomery G. I. Bill (MGIB), but most used the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill (PGIB). Although the PGIB has provisions for tuition and fees, a housing allowance, and book stipends, student veterans expressed concerns about additional financial responsibilities formerly provided in the military.

A significant transitional change that often creates financial stress for student veterans is the cessation of predictable financial support as service members. A financial transitional challenge expressed by participants relates to budgetary challenges as adult students. In some cases, students experience transitional challenges with the timing of PGIB benefits from the Veterans Administration. In one particular situation, Tim was extremely worried that his classes would be dropped because he had not received his PGIB benefits by the required class/registration payment date. When his VA benefits were delayed and his class registration was impacted, he was worried about his classes and financial situation. He stated:

> I was really worried that first month of school because the VA benefits had not gone through at all and the school was saying, hey, you got this bill; you're gonna get dropped from courses, and, yes sir, I was calling Carolyn [SFA veterans counselor] every couple of days, saying, hey, this bill still hasn't cleared . . . dropping my classes, and she kept telling me, "it's alright, I've got your paperwork, you're fine, you're great." But I couldn't help but think. . . . Did I forget something?

Although the financial situation was stressful, he stayed in contact with the campus veterans' counselor to ensure that the VA benefits tuition reimbursement was being processed and his classes would not be dropped. In addition to his inability to pay for classes, he was also unable to purchase textbooks. He met with his class professors and worked out arrangements to get class materials until his PGIB allowance arrived. He stated:

> I was able to talk to most of my professors and say, "Hey, my GI Bill, I get a book stipend, and I'm trying to avoid loans because my GI Bill pays for everything. You know it's just a matter of time to get the money." So why pay interest on a loan when the money is coming in a couple of weeks? I usually talk to all my professors, and say, hey, I'm on a G.I. Bill and probably won't be able to get my books probably until the first, and they're willing to cut me some slack.

Tim indicates he is very concerned about finances. He discussed the comfort sacrifices he has made to keep from borrowing money. He provided an example with the following:

> I've had my heat off for this entire winter now; my central heat. My mom wanted to send me some money, and I said, "No, I'm good." I bought me a little heater, and I bundle up and sit right in front of that thing. I don't need the rest of the apartment to be warm as long as I'm warm. I don't

> have a roommate to worry about; as long as I'm warm, I don't have to worry about it.

He talked about his debt aversion also:

> I've already gotten close to a year and a half of school done. I'm only $4,600 in the hole. That's all I have to pay back when I get out of here. You know that's going to be pretty awesome . . . gonna get to the point where I can't just retake a course. I'm gonna have to repay, pay the government back for that, you know what I mean? I can't just retake the course to get a better grade for it.

His financial challenges extended to his housing. His apartment rent was due before he received his housing allowance from the Veterans Administration (VA) and late fees had accumulated. He described this process that occurred:

> I didn't have to pay a late fee, but my apartment [managers], they're very vet friendly. I explained to them a month in advance, hey, I have a housing allowance; I'm still trying to work it out with the VA; so they were willing to work with me. It's [late fee] $35, and then it's $5 a day up to the 15th for every day it's late. . . .But once I told them, and I took the checks down to them to get deposited . . . [the late fees were waived].

Alaina also talked about the financial concerns she and her student veteran husband, Larry, faced when they enrolled at SFA. She stated:

> The hardest thing was financial. Having a daughter, she was one when we came down here. Having a one-year old and figuring out how or what we are going to do with our daughter and how are we going to pay for babysitting, or what are we gonna do? But, luckily, we qualify for financial aid, and our VA, so that gets us the leeway to pay for daycare. About a year later [Larry]; he was finally approved for the veterans' disability. Now he's actually retired. So we get that, and that helps a lot.

Research participants who had families talked about family responsibilities and the challenges they managed as student veterans.

Family issues. Some student veterans who entered college after military service are married and have children. In this study, Angie is the only member of her family who is a college student; she has three children. As also noted earlier, Alaina and Larry are married and have one child. Student veterans who have children face health and dental care concerns. Additionally, student veteran parents face child care issues.

Alaina pointed out the challenge of being a mother and college student. She said:

> Half the time I don't go home until I get all my homework done cause if I don't do it here [at the VRC on campus], I won't do it at home. Because, you know, I pick up my daughter at 5:30 and then I go home, and it's only my daughter I focus on. At three years old, she expects Mom's attention; and Mom's or Dad's attention only. So yeah, there's [sic] a lot of times I won't go home until I get my homework done.

Angie was in the U.S. National Guard and had been deployed to Kosovo while she was on active duty. She has three children, and her husband is still on active duty in another location approximately five hours from SFA. Angie indicated it is an extreme financial challenge to enter and continue in college and manage family responsibilities. She expressed those family and financial challenges in the following way:

> I have three kids. Most college students don't have any kids. So you have kids and you're taking full-time nursing classes. I can't work. I can't afford to take the time out for what I need to study, to do and have a full time job, or even a part-time job, so I can't work. I get certain benefits from the military, but my G.I. Bill is only 60%. [Angie receives only 60% of the VA benefits as a result of the abbreviated period of time she served on active duty.] I only get 60% so I have to cover the other 40%. And that's difficult because my husband is the only one that [sic] works. And he is active duty right now, so he makes enough to cover what we need to have covered, but we're still barely making it. We did WIC when my kids were younger because we couldn't afford not to do WIC. And I couldn't afford to work because we couldn't afford the day care. And then now I'm here and my kids get older and they're in school, and I have all of that to pay for and my school to pay for. I have to stay with my in-laws. I love them to death, and they're helping me out so much, but I'm not a child, and it's like going back in and living with my parents; and it's that kind of feeling of, well, now I feel like I'm a teenager with a kid I need

> my parents to help take care of. Studying is harder because I have to try to study to pass my classes, but then I have to balance the attention my kids need. . . .Going to see my husband because he is active duty living five hours away. And then you have the twenty-something year olds [traditional college-aged students] with the parents paying for everything and doing this and that, and you know you're just striving along. So it's different and it's difficult, and it's frustrating, but we manage.

Alaina and Larry are married student veterans at SFA. They have a three-year old child who is in day care. Both are U.S. Navy veterans, and they were married while they were in the service. Both served as Seabees in the Navy. Larry credits his daughter with giving him the desire and strength to combat alcohol abuse. He stated that she drives his education goals:

> My purpose here is to be a role model for my daughter. I want to be that figurehead just like every little girl looks up to their daddy. I want to be that figure; that superhero that she looks at and I don't want to be the big, bulky, dumb daddy. I want to be the big bulky daddy with a degree now.

Alaina and Larry contend with balancing family responsibilities with their student responsibilities. Both are full-time students and work together to manage their daughter's day care schedule. Both spend a lot of time at the SFA Veterans Resource Center (VRC) and study for classes during their time there. One of the challenges she and Larry have is coordinating their school schedule with the daycare schedule. There

are often conflicts between campus class schedules and day care schedules. Larry expressed some of the scheduling conflicts in the following way:

> I've noticed a lot this semester with like the school closings and stuff like that. Most of the veterans are commuters. Most veterans have families. If their kids don't go to school, . . . who the hell's gonna watch 'em while they attend class? So the school [SFA] should take consideration to what other schools are doing around them . . . if the ISD goes two hours late, they don't open until 9:30. My class is at 8:00. I'm taking an absence.

Both expressed concern about the dual responsibility of being parents and college students. Another factor that contributes to student veteran stress is the time limit provision in the PGIB.

Time constraints. Additional stressful contributors for student veterans are different types of time constraints. The first is the time limit of the PGIB. There is a thirty-six month limit in the PGIB program. Therefore, many student veterans expressed an urgent need to move quickly through degree requirements. However, some veterans enter college without really knowing what their professional career goal is. Some have academic interests but are often unsure of the types of courses needed for a particular major. For example, some students discussed career interests that, when they began the curriculum, required significant math skills in the academic plan. Some felt deficient in their math skills and realized they should pursue another academic direction.

Another time-related stress contributor is the age restrictions certain jobs impose. For example, Tim is interested in a federal law enforcement career. He indicated that, depending on the particular agency, there are age restrictions. Moreover, depending on a student veteran's age, there could be time issues to complete a degree and obtain a job with a particular federal agency. Tim noted: "You know, our clock is sped up a little bit, you know, for getting law enforcement jobs, for getting stuff like that. . . . So we know our clock is ticking a little bit quicker."

Angie indicated that her time to graduate and enter her profession concerns her. She noted:

> I think it's because a lot of people [traditional-aged students] are straight out of high school, and they did their two years and now they're nursing, at twenty years old. And I'm a decade older doing the same classes, so it's different and it's frustrating.

Alaina also indicated there are time constraints and restrictions that affect her family financially, academically, and logistically. She expressed the following concerns:

> Most of us who are on the GI Bill only have three years. The GI Bill only pays for thirty-six months of school. A lot of [people] have, you know, a regular four year degree to fit into three years. Some of us are taking regular twelve hour semester [loads] while me, I'm taking eighteen hours of schooling. So for me, that's six classes. That's a lot on a person.

> Especially for me; being a mother and wife, plus a student, plus I work. So that's a lot.

Gill stated, "You go through some fifteen or eighteen credit hour semester or even more, you already got that stress on you."

Academic Preparedness

An additional stress contributing category for many student veterans is their level of academic preparedness when they enter college after military service. Many student veterans enlisted in the military immediately after high school and served on active duty for a number of years. Some entered the military reserves and, depending on deployment orders, may not have been out of high school for as many years as active duty veterans. Certain student veterans who joined the armed services near their high school graduation expressed a concern about the period of time between high school and enrollment in college.

Academic gap. Gill expressed concern about the ten year period of time he had been out of high school when he returned to college. Gill commented on the academic readiness challenges that student veterans have when they have had a break in academic work between high school and college. He has been out of high school for ten years. He feels that high school instructional delivery is different today. He stated:

> It's an issue because what the kids are taught today in high school is completely different, you know, what I'm taught. So I'm behind the

> power curve on the new stuff they're taught, especially in the state of Texas. Stuff's taught differently than where I'm from, in California, so, yeah, the age difference played a bit because I have so much, to me I have more responsibility or more that I need to do to get done to actually succeed; where to others, it seems to be easier for them because they don't have that gap from high school to college.

James noted the gap of academic continuity that differentiated traditional-aged students from student veterans and inferred that academic transition challenges student veterans as a result. He stated:

> Because the problem is that universities, ninety-four percent or greater, are filled with professional students---even if they're a first gen [sic], it doesn't matter. All they've done their whole life is gone to elementary school to 12th grade and graduated and come to college. . . . But we have been out of algebra for 20, 30 years. Even if it's at 10 years, it ain't gonna work. It ain't gonna jive.

James's perspectives emerged from a focus group session. As he discussed the continuity gap between high school and college for student veterans, there were nods of assent and affirmation from other group members. Another stress contributor in the academic preparedness category was student veterans' concern about their ability to perform academically and concerns about academic competency tests.

Academic competency examinations. The Texas Education Code 51.0362, (TEC 51.0362) requires institutions of higher education to assess entering undergraduate students' academic readiness to enroll in freshman-level coursework. The plan is referred to as the Texas Success Initiative (TSI), and it allows an institution of higher education to exempt most student veterans from testing requirements. During a focus group session, there was vigorous discussion about the TSI exemption for student veterans at SFA. The focus group participants wholeheartedly agreed that an automatic exemption of student veterans without a discussion of the academic ramifications was a disservice to the individuals. One participant noted:

> At some point veterans will know they are deficient in some areas, and they won't unless they get support from the TSI. This is an example for this TSI testing; if they have true support, they will take the remedial course. If they don't have support and they throw them in remedial courses, the veteran's not . . . gaining any ground forward.

I asked if the TSI assessment should be an option to evaluate a student veteran's level of academic preparedness. One student veteran's answer was:

> I would love it to be presented to veterans as an option. Because if you're gonna, and even if it's the university or the systems of college to go, "Okay, Bob, you're going into engineering. Are you good at math? No. Well, first of all this might not be a good deal, but let's test you and see where you stand in math. I want to go into nutrition. Well, we know that

> nutrition is a lot of math; a lot of chemistry. Let's. . . . have you thought about taking this option to see where you stand on your math scores?

All of the participants indicated that advisors should point out that if a student were deficient in math or verbal skills, he or she could choose to take the TSI to determine whether remediation would be necessary or helpful. One articulated the concern as follows:

> I think there's an injustice to some degree from the State of Texas. And this is probably every state for veterans. TSI standards are waived for veterans. . . . But if they know they're bad in math, if they know they're bad in English, . . . they need to take the exam . . . because if you have waived TSI rights, . . . an advisor can't appoint you to go any lower.

Another interjected: "I haven't practiced algebra since six years ago; or something like that; eight years ago."

Academic advising and direction. Another stress concern for student veterans also emerged out of a focus group session. The first analysis regarded a student veteran's selection of an academic major and career choice. There was concern expressed that student veterans don't have adequate academic guidance and advising. One student veteran stated:

> I mean, like, there's a number of different degrees offered here on campus. Whenever I came in, I knew what I wanted. It was going to be a

> criminal justice degree. I didn't know about anything else. . . . This is my last semester, and this is the only semester that I've taken any classes [other than required], so I didn't know about the options.

Focus group participants were adamant about the lack of academic advising and guidance for student veterans. The analysis about the need for student veteran advising continued as follows:

> We talked about it a little earlier. It's about knowing. And people who are in the know have more options. But also in the know, you feel supported. So even if there's an option and they're [advisors] willing to ask two or three more questions, five more minutes extra that advisement appointment. . . . Yeah, that would make sense."

Other veterans in the focus group spoke up. One stated about academic advisors: "They've got to give a damn. The problem is with advisors; I don't think they get to know their students. Even if we do sit there and beat them over the head, saying we're a veteran."

Another student veteran expressed his concerns and discussed what is important:

> …[Some faculty] ask you what you want to do with your degree. He's thinking about it now, right?. . . And like, Dr. Ben, was like, well, "Hey, come to my office, and I need to talk to you. We need to have a discussion about your career and maybe some options."

Gill indicated that advising and academic mentoring were important. He indicated that he had selected political science as a major but had been concerned with the choice. He talked to a student veteran mentor who gave him academic advice and direction. Gill expressed his academic change in direction as follows:

> Right now, I'm doing political science. After I talked with James, since I'm kind of a health and fitness guy, he kind of convinced me to switch over to kinesiology where I can use that afterward since I'm already doing programs outside of SFA to get my certificate of training for fitness trainer, and all that stuff, as health coach. So, he said; "Kinesiology would be a better path for you because of the stuff you already know. You enjoy it way too much, so you probably should switch."

Information: Uncertainty and the Unknown

Military service members are trained to obtain information to assess life or death decisions. The quality of information that a service member obtains, and the decisions that are based and made from that information can mean the difference between success and failure, life and death, and future events. The importance of having quality information is engrained in armed forces members at the beginning of their military service. Some veterans expressed concerns about student veterans' need for and opportunities available to get information. Some student veterans expressed concerns about an unknown college environment and the academic choices they need to make. Other veterans were accustomed to managing uncertainty and gathering information.

Carl indicated that student veterans are somewhat concerned about uncertainty on a college campus. Veterans are accustomed to information that comes through an environment they trust and understand. Information, uncertainty, and trust are concerns that Carl expressed. He elaborated:

> A lot of us come out of the military with some deep-seated trust issues. You know, it's like, I don't know if these people have my back, you know. Because when you're in, you're in, you're a unit, you know. Those people are there. They're gonna have your back, just like you have their back. You know it's a brotherhood. But the when you get out and you come to some place like this, you don't know. And so you just--I think a lot of us feel kind of uncertain around [here], you know.

Jalen indicated he had difficulty obtaining the college-related information he needed. Jalen was in the army reserves and entered college after his training. He described his experience in the following way:

> When I first came to college before I was deployed, it was very difficult. It was hard because first of all, I'm a first generation student. So I couldn't call back home and say, "Hey, how do I do this? What is this? How do I do that, you know?" I had to find people locally to help me out. I'm like wait; how do you use this student loan repayment? I don't know how to do it . . . when you come to college, you don't really know what to look for.

Other research participants talked about their need for information and emphasized the importance of a person who could direct them to campus departments to obtain enrollment information, academic information, and financial information. Tom provided the following perspective about the need for information:

> I wasn't too sure about the whole college process. I almost knew nothing about going to college. I came to school [visited the campus] and walked around a little bit and found Admissions; [I] talked to Carolyn [veterans' counselor] and seeing what I had to do, I came over here [Veterans Resource Center] and talked to James a little bit, and they helped me out, and he was kind of showing me the ropes, and I enrolled in school, and I had my paperwork processed.

Gerald indicated he encountered some challenges obtaining information when he first attempted to register for classes.

> I just went online there, and it says . . . and it comes up with these holds you don't know; advising hold, so I quick call up [sic], don't know which number I called, but call up the department number, and they, [say] "Oh yeah, get ahold [sic] of this person, or I'll transfer you to this person." So, I was talking to this person . . . and get that hold off, one or two holds, and made those phone calls.

Angie expressed some concerns about how to get the type of information that student veterans need. She described situation in the following way:

> When I first came to SFA last semester, I did not know where to take anything. And so I came to the transfer orientation. And I did that, and I didn't do everything they were doing; most of it was "get involved, do this, do that." . . . I ran into the ROTC recruiter and he talked me into doing ROTC, and I believe it was him that I asked where I needed to go. And he just said, "[The Veteran Counselor]." I walked up to [her], told her my situation, and she was like I need this, this, this, and this. I said, "Okay," and I got it to her that day, and I was good.

Angie indicated that in some instances staff expect student veterans to know what to do on campus. She stated:

> It's almost like you just get this odd look, to where they're looking at your papers, and they see your birth date, and they know you're not eighteen years old, and so, it's like, "Well, how come you don't know this? How come you can't do this for yourself?"

Alaina expressed concerns about the information needed and the level of paperwork that is required for student veterans to enroll and set up VA (Veterans Administration) G.I. bill payments. She described her challenges in the following way:

> Some of the paperwork is kind of challenging because being in the military world and then get to civilian [sic], you're kind of confused on some of the paperwork because it's not worded correctly or to your thinking.

Larry also mentioned the importance of information and the need to have support to obtain it. He elaborated:

> What really helped me out the most is the admissions side with the VA with [the veterans' counselor]. She was walking me through the process the whole way. I would call her and be like, "Okay, I got this done; what's the next step?" And she just kept helping me all the way through the process, and that's what made it a little less stressful.

Tom talked about finding someone on campus to help get him registered for classes. He described the transition to SFA in the following way:

> I got out of the military in 2012, July. I had enough leave saved up. I had a couple of months to move while still being paid. I wasn't too sure about the whole college process. I almost knew nothing about going to college besides what some of my friends had said about going to college. Really, I knew nothing. But I was gonna go to college. . . . I walked around a little bit and found the admissions office, talked to Carolyn [veterans' counselor]. . . . enrolled in school, and I had my paperwork processed.

Gerald took the initiative to obtain information and enrolled at SFA. In the military, he had experience with information gathering from briefings on the new bases he was assigned to. While he was in the U.S. Air Force, he enrolled in SFA online college classes and, after his tour ended, wanted to enroll in college full-time. Gerald described the information gathering and college enrollment process.

> Well, I was pretty sure, even going in, before I got in the military, that I wanted to get out and go to school. It was kind of something to keep my options open. I just went online [SFA's web site], and it takes you through the initial process, so I was looking to register for fall classes. So, Fall 2012, well summer, I put my application in here, so Fall 2012, and took two online classes here, while I was still working full-time in the Air Force. I had my final out on January 3rd; . . . and then started classes.

He also attended an SFA orientation class that he described as geared toward beginning freshmen. At the orientation, he met VRC student veterans who had an information booth at orientation. He developed friendships with some student veterans through the VRC and established a social connection with other veterans.

Gerald indicated that his military experience helped prepare him to seek information for decisions he was interested in or responsibilities he had. Gerald had a weather forecaster job in the Air Force. In that particular job function, his responsibility was to gather weather data and have it available for Air Force flight plans. He discussed the importance of obtaining accurate information and related that to the necessary

accuracy regarding weather information and having that information available to decision makers:

> I had been doing forecasting, and you know, like many jobs in the military, it was pretty important if you get it right, whether you really screw up the weather, you could be telling someone you have good weather and be sending and cause them to crash, die, and it's huge you got to get it right; you got a question you need to ask, you ask it. So, I think that was something that definitely helped; I wasn't afraid to ask questions. So, that was something I always kind of did with homework assignments; you get one of my friends that was pretty smart in the class, "Hey would you just do a quick look over my homework assignment real quick?"

Cade described the opportunities he had that helped his transition from the military to college. He stated:

> I was in the Marine Corps. All services have the transition classes, and they've gotten better over the years. They [military] will bring in people who were former veterans or people that were dependents or had worked in the veteran scene, the military scene for a long time. They gave us web sites, they helped us build resumes for whatever choice you were going to do. There were two classes. There was one for vocational people, and

> there was another group that was actually looking to go back into the university.

Jalen had some challenges obtaining enrollment information. Jalen commented that when he first came to college, he was lost. He described his information challenges in the following way:

> When you come to college, you don't really know what to look for. I have these benefits, but who do I go to? Where do I go? Where do I start? I have no idea what those terms mean. So it was definitely hard in the beginning . . . not knowing where to start.

Some student veterans who served in reserve components of the military encountered challenges getting the type of information they needed for the transition to college after military deployment ended. Reserve components include the Army National Guard, Air National Guard, and reserve units in the major military branches. Normally, after training is concluded, service members in reserve components typically serve one weekend per month and two weeks during the summer or other specified periods. However, when needed, reserve service members are called to active duty. Other reserve service members served and then entered college. Nick was one of those.

Nick indicated the information challenges he grappled with were the timing of his active duty deployment and release orders. He was called to active duty while he was in school, and he had to rearrange his schedule in order to serve on National Guard

active duty. He also noted that there were transition challenges back to college. He explained the challenge as follows:

> Coming back from a deployment standpoint, it's like you get your challenges or whatever based on the amount of time that you have notification of; you'll be returning on this date; can you or will you be able to make arrangements to go back to school and further your education?

Nick also noted challenges in obtaining information and being able to plan his return to college. He explained it in the following way:

> I guess there's no real way you can say, "Well, we'll know for certain we're gonna be coming home this day." We planned to be out there longer than we were there for. But due to state funding allocations, we weren't. So, that was an issue I encountered. Like, I literally had to make last minute plans.

He obtained the information needed from contacts in the SFA VRC and was able to complete his processing and re-enter the university.

Tom talked about the information-sharing role the VRC offers student veterans. He offered a specific example about student veterans military reservists and explained it as follows:

> You know, I mean there are some guys who come in here who are National Guard-- students here on campus--and they're like their sergeant should have told them to begin with, but they don't know the process for getting my financial aid, you know. You know, I started one year in the National Guard after I got off active duty, so I let them know and whatnot; so yeah, I mean 100% information is the most important deal.

As indicated above, many research participants expressed the importance of obtaining information used to guide one's direction or decision-making. The next section analyzes research participants' concerns about obtaining academic feedback. The respondents indicated student veterans' expect some type of reliable feedback process from faculty and advisors.

Information Feedback

As discussed earlier, student veterans seek information for various types of decisions. The military has an information feedback system used to evaluate performance, and military service members are accustomed to that process, using it to make career or adjustment decisions. In a focus group, research participants discussed the need for student veterans to have feedback on their academic performance and/or career potential. Those concerns were expressed as follows:

> Like, you talk to some people. You're like clearly, like you know, Dude, I hate to break it to you; I don't know like if you really want to be a law

> enforcement officer . . . you don't have to work out necessarily [sic], but if this is what you're wanting to do for a living, like it's not such a good idea. There are other options out there. You can choose now.

Another research participant in a focus group continued the analysis. He provided an example from class. He relayed the example as follows:

> You know, like one of our, you know, Dr. Bill; I wasn't in the class, but he teaches interrogation, right? And some of the guys like have to do projects and things like that; Dr. Bill was like, "Guys, promise me that you are never going to become interrogators." And he was like, you know, just being brutally honest. "Y'all did stuff to pass a class. But I think you will never be able to do this in a professional setting."

Another research participant in the focus group spoke up and said, "I want to know if I am doing something wrong. Another said. ". . . We want to know the real deal. Don't sugar-coat it. Tell me know I'm doing. If I'm not going to be good for this position in a professional role, tell me now." Another rhetorically asked, "How can I know this if you don't tell me?"

Alaina discussed the importance of feedback from student veterans' professors. She indicated:

> Well, that's the problem with some professors. They don't tell you until it's too late to fix it. Like Dr. Bill, all my classes, you wouldn't know

> your grade until the end of the semester. And he was never in his office, never answered emails. And the now that Dr. Ann teaches the class that I'm taking that Dr. Bill used to teach, Dr. Ann lets you know how you're doing. That's what I like. Let me know how I'm doing.

Another research participant in a focus group pointed out scheduling issues related to obtaining information and feedback from faculty members. From a student veteran's perspective, he said:

> Most of us have an outside life--whether it be a family or something like that. And the office hours that most of the professors provide are during times you take your other classes cause you take your classes, and then you still have a full-time job and taking care of your family on the outside. So, just that feedback kind of helps you.

The need student veterans expressed for information and feedback leads to a section in the chapter where research participants responded to additional elements in the higher education environment. The next section addresses certain veteran adaption challenges from the military to the higher educational environment.

Environmental Reconciliation

Structure

The notion of military structure was addressed broadly in the section on culture. Elements of structure include the customs, traditions, and rituals that are part of military culture. However, the concept of military structure is deeper than a reference to culture. Structure provides the foundation, framework, and boundaries of the military life. Service members are so bound by structural military confinements that it appears to create a physical and emotional insulation for many of them. In many ways, the military is a closed system. Geographic assignments are ordered, the period of assignment is determined by order, and enlistment periods are fixed.

Except in extraordinary circumstances, service members must serve the entirety of their enlistment period; therefore, choices and options to move from one duty station to another are typically not allowed, and choices to leave the military during an enlistment period are not typically allowed. Moreover, the systemic structure prevents or perhaps insulates a service member from making open-ended choices without serious repercussions.

Conversely, student veterans are often challenged in higher education because in many ways, the higher education environment is an open system. A student veteran can select a major, change a major, take the number of semester credit hours during a semester he or she chooses, sit out of school for a semester, transfer to another university, or select from many other choices. Many student veterans are often

bewildered by the lack of structure in higher education as well as the lack of direction provided by the campus environment. Cade discussed the emotional insulation the military structure provided and talked about the loss of structure that can challenge student veterans. In his observation of student veterans who were married and had families, he noted:

> You could see it in some of the veterans' faces--the ones with families and kids and things like that cause I could imagine it's a scary time. Coming from something you've been provided and told pretty much whatever, everything you need, whether it be base housing or whether it be, "Here's your first and fifteenth paycheck," regardless of what happens. And again, in the military, it's, "Hey, here you go. Get in this line, and we're going to march you over to medical or march you over to wherever you need to go." You know, to get what you need kind of thing. You have hit lists every month that say hey, you got to go get dental. You got to go get medical. Make sure you go get this before you do that. Make sure you go down to supplies and things like that, so it's a structure.

Cade indicated that many veterans who had left the military said they missed the structural framework of the military. Those he talked to noted they "had so much time on their hands." When they go out, they didn't know what to do. James stated:

> So, there in the thick of transitions; . . . the freedom that you have is absolutely frightening. You feel vulnerable; you feel naked. And I

> correlate this and kind of associate this with when a prisoner gets out of prison, they are naked. They are vulnerable. They don't know what to do. And you can say the same things for veterans. . . . and, now, I'm studying English and History and Political Science and those things I've never done, and good Lord, I feel like a fake doing it. It's scary.

James also indicated that military structure provided a predictable routine for service members whom he believes student veterans miss. He described military life, routines that shaped the thinking for many student veterans. He explained:

> [There were] regimented times, calls, when you did something, when formation was, how a day was structured. Because our days were normally kicked off with a formation, it ended with a formation. A lot of times we were led to chow halls as a team.

Another environmental challenge research participants described is the cultural change from the military to higher education.

Culture

Communication. A cultural challenge in the transition to college practice is the way student veterans, traditional-aged students, and faculty communicate in class and in social settings. Student veterans are often viewed as being very direct and blunt. From a social perspective, higher education is often considered an environment where politeness, tact, and discretion are encouraged. Enter the veteran who is used to

accomplishing tasks with no more communication than necessary. Alaina, the veteran, student, wife, and mother, had this to say about the way veterans communicate in class and with students:

> Some of them don't know how to take us because we're outspoken. We're very outspoken. Should we speak out, or should we just sit in the corner and let all these kids speak? I think that's one of the biggest things. You get kids, and they say something negative about the military or negative about any past wars or wars today, and it kind of goes to [our] heart. So, I think that's one of the hardest things . . . as a veteran to get them to understand.

The military culture does not foster indirect communication. Orders are issued without a please or a thank you. The communication culture supports the superior who issues a specific directive, and the subordinate service member accepts the directive as an order to be carried out. In some cases, a subordinate may request clarification, but in the military, an order is not negotiable unless it violates military regulations or protocol. Tom noted that direct military communication became a habit. In a focus group, he weighed in on communication as a military habit and custom that caused problems for student veterans. He stated:

> [Challenging habit] I would say the way you talk to other people. I always found that to be difficult because I'm a pretty blunt person, but like the way you talk to your soldiers in the military or the way your

> superiors talk to you--usually mean, derogatory . . . whenever you have a problem with the professor, . . . you can't talk that way to them. You know what I'm saying? "You gotta find a way to phrase your question," James added: "You got to sugar coat it."

College classrooms often provide opportunities for discussion and debate. Most faculty members encourage discussion, and some encourage debate. Topics or beliefs that are very intrinsic to some people can create emotionally-charged discussions. Tim is another veteran who is very direct and willing to express himself about ideas or subjects he feels strongly about. He offered a perspective highlighting the cultural communication differences between student veterans and traditional-aged college students:

> I knew all these things . . . coming into college . . . I said to myself, I'm not gonna change for these people; I don't care if they don't like my opinion. All of us are adults now. They can deal with it . . . . Life's not gonna give you a cookie when you're scared. Life ain't gonna pull you in like it's all right . . . . One of my favorite quotes: "Most people call me an asshole; I just call it being honest." . . . I'm not afraid to call anybody out in class. It's like, you know, "That's stupid."

As indicated by the research participants, communication and culture were particular environmental concerns research participants discussed. The next section

examines PTSD, a condition examined in great detail in Chapter II. As Chapter II noted, PTSD is a complex condition that affects many student veterans.

PTSD

Although student veterans made references to PTSD, none went into great detail to link specific experiences to the condition. Rather, any references to PTSD were made from a symptomatic perspective such as depression, anxiety, crowd concerns, etc. In an examination of veteran stereotypes and presumptions, a research participant in a focus group stated:

> It's not our job to make assumptions--just like we don't want people to make assumptions about me. That guy has a navy hat on; that dude is a veteran . . . about to go off and start killing people. That dude has PTSD out of his mind. He beats his wife. [That stereotype] It's just distasteful.

Another veteran in the focus group relayed a story about a PTSD discussion in a psychology class. He stated:

> I even got it in some of my classes. In one of my psych [sic] classes of all things, . . . they were talking about PTSD . . . I *mean* [emphasis added] PTSD, PTSD, PTSD. I think it should be PTS or something. It's just my reaction to stress. There's no way I'd kill anybody; . . . [I might] drink whatever, you know. Then, you might have where that stress and anxiety has gotten to a certain point, then it might not be violent toward

somebody else, they may just be violent toward themselves. . . . They can't change. Something they have no power over.

Another research participant joined in:

Someone might have PTSD and just not be able to sleep at night. This is what would shock most students. Most . . . veterans here have some form of traumatic stress, some type of syndrome of post-traumatic stress.

The research participants provided their perspectives about PTSD and discussed its impact on veterans' transition to college. According to those individuals, the condition follows them from military service to college. The data analysis moves from PTSD as a specific challenge into an examination of the broader higher educational environment.

Environmental Adaptation

A significant aspect of a military service member's transition to college is the movement into a different environment. Part of that examination involves a change in culture and structure. Those possible transition challenges have been analyzed. However, another challenge for veterans entering college is the physical college environment, and the adjustments some veterans make to function in that environment. Combat veterans are always concerned with and focus on threat analysis. As James stated previously, "It's part of our DNA." Some former military assignments might include enemy identification, mission initiatives, and urban warfare.

Threat Analysis

Combat veterans have survived in a life context where life and death were often separated by infinitesimal degrees. Threat awareness often stands between life and death for service members. The experiences, training, and survival instincts are a part of a veteran's thinking, concerns, preparation, and reactions. Interestingly, combat veterans speak of potential threats, threat identification, and ways of addressing threats. In this examination, threats appeared to represent a composite which included people, weapons, and a lack of situational control. Student veterans who experienced combat and constantly evaluated threats have a difficult time turning off the "threat analysis" in a higher education environment. Research participants talked of how their "hyper awareness" created concentration and focus challenges in the classroom. James talked about some of his experiences and indicated that vigilance and awareness continues to drive some student veterans' thinking. He stated:

> [Threat analysis] When I got to college, I felt so vulnerable. I've got this hyper-sensitive awareness. When I first got here, I'm looking at rooftops. I'm looking at windowsills. I'm looking at vantage points. I'm looking at exit and egress routes. Where's the threat gonna come from? And how am I gonna react? I know I'm gonna move forward cause that's what I was trained to do. . . . And at some point you're so worked up over the days and months, you're just like, whatever.

James had some perspective about the challenges a combat veteran may have on a college campus. He discussed the instinctive threat analysis and concerns and described his transition to college as follows:

> Nerve-racking. I would say nerve-racking, coming from a hostile environment, highly structured environment, to almost no structure at all. . . . My hyper-awareness is what added to the stress and anxiety. You go from a rucksack and a weapon; a couple of weapons, explosives, things like that, you are carrying. You have to put that down and pick up a bag of books and then walk into this massive environment-- big buildings with doctors in them.

Larry expressed concerns about his ability to function, focus and concentrate in classes. He noted he was distracted by always looking for threats. He stated:

> I'm very attentive to everything around. Like, if there are sudden movements. Sometimes, I still freak out a little bit, start looking around, start watching my back. Your animal side, they brainwash into you. As much as they say they don't brainwash you, they really do. They teach you live or die. You either adjust to what we need, or you'll be the weak. And the hungry wolves will prey on the weak.

Threat awareness and assessment of the physical environment on a college campus include classrooms and crowds.

Classrooms and crowds. Because of their experiences and training, combat veterans often encounter stress in classrooms and crowds. Crowded classrooms appear to be a significant concern for student combat veterans. James, Larry, and Gill are combat veterans. Each expressed similar concerns about crowded conditions in classrooms and their ability to concentrate on tests. As noted, some of their higher education adaptation challenges include crowded, congested areas such as classrooms. The academic testing environment was particularly difficult. James articulated his concerns as follows:

> Crowds, congestion itself. Being in small, confined classrooms with forty people; people talking behind you, people walking behind you. Testing was very difficult for me. It was very stressful and anxiety ridden . . . because I was looking at the small of the back, the waist line, the ankles. I was looking for a weapon every time someone was getting up, making sure I had appropriate exit strategies.

Larry had similar concerns about crowded classrooms and the perception of threats he dealt with. He noted:

> I never let anyone come up behind me. I always put my back against the wall. That way I can view side to side, and it's just that's the only way I can combat myself and keep myself at bay from my anxiety . . . I'm a person who has to know my surroundings. . . . I hear the professor every day, so I'm OK with that voice. Now you hear a sudden noise in a combat zone; a sudden noise, hmmmmmm; usually you're dead, or you're caught

> off guard. . . . I have to know my surroundings . . . they [faculty and non-veteran students] don't understand why we square up to people. They don't understand why we are always in a state of aggression. Because most people in a combat situation, it's tuck tail and run.

The training, threat awareness, realities, and reactions created anxieties and tension for combat veterans that continue in their transition as college students.

Gill also expressed concerns about being a crowded student classroom. He discussed his ingrained need to analyze crowded classroom perceived threats in a similar manner that James and Larry had. Gill stated:

> That's the hardest thing to get past . . . that function that is pretty much put into us is, you know. . . . if a threat comes in, where's it coming? Where's it going to first? How can I defeat that threat from where I'm at with what I have? It's something that we're taught to do, and it will stay with us. That's how I am when I'm driving, when I'm in a classroom, or even out at fairs or a concert or anything like that.

Threat analysis and classroom concentration. The threat evaluation process a combat veteran uses may influence his or her classroom concentration. When testing, student veterans may lose class focus and concentration if unrecognized noises take place or other students move around. Gill and Larry discussed classroom distractions and student veterans' embedded needs to evaluate threats. Gill discussed his classroom concentration challenges that related to his sensitivity to potential threats.

> That's definitely what my distraction is because we're always taught to always stay alert, you know, head on a swivel. So, I'm doing that, and I'll be focusing, and the minute I see someone's phone or computer flash, or something moves out of the normal, you know, then, I quickly jump to and look at it. You know, I lose my train of thought, paying attention to it. Now, I'm looking over at that, to see what it was. Was it a threat? Okay, it's not. Now, I got to look back around, scan around, and then get back in my place. . . . It's just something that's never gonna leave.

Larry also discussed the concentration challenges he encountered in classrooms. He discussed noises, student movements in class, and classroom distractions in a testing environment.

> It's very startling. You're down there trying to focus; my back's against the wall, but you hear someone's chair screech across the floor. It's that sudden movement, and then all of a sudden, they pop up and start walking. You're like, you get distracted. You look up, and then the professor looks at you because they're looking at you to see if you're cheating. And then you get, . . . like, what are you looking at me for? Because they just don't know. I wish there was a way that more professors understood what veterans really look at and how they look at it.

Larry mentioned a perspective from a combat marine about the challenges that stem from combat experiences.

> He goes, "There's no such damn thing as transition back simply because it's ingrained into your head to a point to where it's everyday life. He goes, "You will always struggle with some form or another. Some more than others, but you will transition from the day you get out to the day you lay your head for the last time. There will always be something."

A focus group participant discussed in greater detail how his military experiences impacted his ability to negotiate the higher education campus environment. He referred to events or circumstances he believed traditional-aged students do not understand. He stated:

> And for me, that's the hardest stuff to relate to with all these people on campus . . . that's why I hang out here [VRC] . . . to be with people who I can relate to by experience and things like that; people who have never been deployed or never had a combat experience or never been in the military in general, they don't get that. They don't get what it's like to, you know, feel uncomfortable if you're not sitting in a corner of the room facing a door. They don't get what it's like to drive down the highway and see a trash bag on the side of the road and think, "oh, shit," you know, speed it up or stop? And when people like us, when we freak out or if we get real tense or scared, they see it. They're like, "What the hell is

wrong with you?" And that's one of the things I struggled with trying to come back to college.

In this section, some research participants discussed transition challenges that resulted from military training and experience. The participants expressed challenges impacting their transitions to college as students. In the following section, research participants discuss the formation and importance of their military identity. They present transition challenges as they attempt to reconcile their former military identity with the acquisition of a new college student identity.

Identity

Identity Formation

To help convey the cultural differences between the military and the higher education environment, I will evaluate the process that builds military identity in an individual. The transition of a military service member to a college student is influenced by a series of events that occur in a student veteran's life. To ultimately examine the transition from a military to a higher educational environment, I will examine the cultural influences that impact a veteran's identity formation and the later cultural adaptation to higher education.

Military culture. The United States armed forces is a very unique cultural environment. There are sub-cultural components in the respective branches; however, for the most part, all embrace an over-arching military culture based on law, regulations,

policies, governance, structure, order, discipline, commitment, tradition, rituals, customs, and other relevant attributes. The cultural conversion from a civilian to an enlisted military service member begins with the oath of enlistment.

The enlistment oath establishes a purpose that transcends goals, plans, or operations. It commits a military service member to a grand order governed and directed by a structure and uniformity contained within the United States military. After taking the oath of enlistment, most service members feel a progressively developed sense of belonging and structure. Therefore, the transition from civilian to military service member is branded by a commitment of one's service and even, life.

The progression of the military adaptation for an enlisted service member continues in basic training. Regardless of the military branch, basic training begins the conversion from civilian life to military life. Trainees are taught about military regulations, structure, chain of command, traditions, customs, and other administrative information. The training is designed to indoctrinate an individual to military thinking, and prepare the enlistee for service in the defense of the United States of America. James noted:

> And that does change a person because like you said, like I said at the very beginning, you have to chop that civilian out of the person. What you do is chop the emotion out. You drop it to the floor. You're beneath me. You're the bottom of my shoe. Then you build them up because it's a lot easier to lead that way. We need to do this. You're a part of this team.

> After that, here we go. And you get your work done. You complete the missions. And you win.

The transition from civilian to soldier, marine, airman, or sailor is a transformation from a civilian culture to a military culture. Regardless of a service member's future job function, he or she is taught various types of weapons training to prepare for a variety of combat roles that are part of one's primary responsibilities or that might develop. From the beginning of basic training, the warrior mentality is cultivated. Moreover, each U.S. military branch has a creed that provides values and identify for its respective members.

The cultural transformation from civilian to service member also includes changes in habits, customs, traditions, and rituals. In addition to training, various activities further reinforce military culture. One such activity is the requirement for any enlisted service member to salute an officer, a practice designed to communicate respect for the officer. Additionally, the practice serves to reinforce military order and culture while blending the service member into the broader military culture. Military requirements, customs, traditions, and habits are part of that cultural identity that challenge student veterans as they set aside those practices and begin the transition to college.

All of these transformation processes become a part of a veteran's world view and thinking. As a student veteran, it is sometimes difficult to set aside the military culture and embrace the higher education culture. One challenge that student veterans face is the relinquishment of the military command structure that required enlisted

service members to salute officers. Saluting, chain of command reporting restrictions, and specific regulations governed student veterans' military experiences. Some student veterans experienced challenges dealing with campus authority figures. For example, in a focus group session, one research participant described the authority perspective in the following way:

> We've always been taught, you know, if you see brass; . . . scatter--out of sight, out of mind. So, we never really talked to them. So, when you see a professor, you see a doctor, they're like, come meet me at my office hours. *Uh, no* [emphasis added]. . . . You don't want to talk to your higher ups. And you look at these professors as your C.O. [commanding officer] or X.O. [executive officer] or something like that.

James added: "I looked at all of these buildings, and I thought of all of the doctors in them. The only doctors I ever knew passed out Motrin and foot powder." Some student veterans seem to struggle with the need to release the rigid military command structure and tend to project that model into the higher education environment, which can affect student veteran social relationships.

Permanent military identity. The training, commitment, and discipline that have been used to forge military service members are often permanent additions to a young person's formative identity. Most enlisted service members enter military service at a young, shapeable age. Therefore, for some, the concepts, attributes, customs, and traditions "ingrained" into their identity become permanent.

Carl suggested that part of the military identity that stays with veterans is the sense of duty and the sense of purpose developed in the military. He indicated that it is very hard to put that part of identity aside because it is linked to a value system. Carl specifically stated:

> I came out of the Air Force, and all of a sudden, I'm not a soldier anymore . . . I mean, people that chose to go into the armed services, you know, have kind of a sense of duty and sense of purpose about them, you know. And granted, there it's a little more complicated than just that, you know. And I think once you're there, then the military just kind of develops that even further. . . . Once you pick up something like that, it's hard to put it down.

At the time of his interview, Tom was in his last semester and did graduate from SFA in May, 2015. It was interesting to note his perspective about his "permanent military identity." He stated: "It's hard for me to describe myself necessarily as a college student. I always think of myself still; I'm not, I was a soldier. [However] I still think of myself as a soldier."

During the second focus group session, a discussion took place about the transition process a service member experiences from the military to college. The analysis appeared to further confirm Tom's earlier perception that veterans retain the military dimension of their identity as an essential core. A student veteran commented that his transition will never be complete. He stated:

> My transition will never be complete from a veteran because I will always be a veteran. But at the same time, once you're out of that lifestyle . . . you're keeping what means the most to you, but you're accepting the change. You're not completely transitioned; you're transitioning to be accepted.

Another student veteran rhetorically asked, "Because what's after that? If you're gonna transition, you're gonna transition from a transition point?"

The focus group data examination continued with the concept of veteran identity. James provided his perspective about the importance of military identity to him. He described it in the following way:

> When I got out of the military, I tried to be the Army Ranger for a long time. Here [in college], it's a false story. But to me, it's a true story. It's exactly who I am. It wasn't going to work out if I was going to be the Army Ranger, though. It wasn't. I was gonna have to learn something. Luckily, I had a mentor, just a wonderful mentor…

A focus group participant elaborated further on his identity conflict. He stated:

> I didn't want to show that I was weak; that . . . one time that I was three hours from death and rolling to a surgery room that I finally gave up, trying to fight in that other identity . . . I went and got some counseling . . . I had to figure out who I was now, without losing what I was before.

> And when I; [pause] this is the hard part about it; some of us will have to accept some new form of identity.

Another focus group participant contended that identity contained different aspects that represented an individual. He looked at Alaina and commented that she could not break her mother status into percentages. Alaina agreed and stated:

> No, you're right, you can't. I mean me being a wife, a mother, a student, a veteran. And it's *hard*, [emphasis added] cause you can't just break it up into percentages. I have to be a 100% wife cause I constantly have to take care of him [Larry] to make sure he's okay cause he does have PTSD. He does take medication, and if I don't remind him, he's the worst to deal with. Okay. I'm a 100% mother because I have a three year old daughter who I have to make sure I clothe, feed, bathe, make sure she's okay, put her to bed. And then I'm a student, so I'm definitely that.

Research participants provided different perspectives about veteran identity and indicated some challenges they encountered in the transition to college. The concept of identity was important to many of the student veterans. The next section analyzes a student veteran's sense of purpose and analyzes research participants' insight in their college transition process.

Sense of Purpose

Mission

Military service members understand a mission as a directive to accomplish a specific task or objective, and that type of thinking remains for many student veterans. Some leave the military and enter college without direction or mission. Some student veterans indicate they are looking for a specific directive or order that provides guidance on how a particular objective is to be carried out. Some veterans enter college with misgivings about the lack of a specific plan or direction. Without that focus, the choices often seem to be overwhelming. When I asked about college decisions, Angie indicated she sometimes questions whether she is doing the right thing by attending college. She explained:

> I still think it [college] is the right choice. [But] "Am I supposed to be In college?" Am I supposed to do this, or do I just need to go back into the military, or just be a stay at home mom? I still question it daily.

Although she questions her purpose and direction, Angie indicated she treats college as her mission at this point in her life:

> I do and I don't. I guess I kind of do because I've worked so hard to get where I am. And at times, I think I've had to work three times as hard as some of the other students. I mean whether I have or haven't, but it feels like I have, and now that I'm finally in the nursing program, and I'm

> doing nursing classes, it's okay. . . . I've worked so hard to get here I belong here; this is my spot. . . . But, because nursing is applying and doing all these things you have to do to get accepted and to start the nursing classes, I worked my butt off to get here. I belong here. I did this.

As noted by Angie, different student veterans use various approaches to rationalize and confirm their purpose in higher education. Alaina stated, "I decided to do criminal justice because I've always wanted to be a cop." Alaina's strategy is to identify school as her mission. As formerly stated, she wants to be a law enforcement officer and uses that career desire to establish the immediate mission of completing her degree and graduating. She stated:

> [College] I see it pretty much as a mission, something that I want to accomplish not only for me, but for my daughter. I want to show her that without a degree you can't really do anything today. It's to the point now where you have to have a bachelor's degree to have a really good-paying job. Even in law enforcement, you have to have a bachelor's degree.

Larry also viewed his college purpose as a job or mission. He noted that student veterans don't see college as a time to party or have fun. He stated student veterans are not eighteen years old and have been out in the world. He suggested that when student veterans look at college their position is, "We're like, this is a damn job. If veterans don't treat college as a job, they will waste and lose time and do the same thing these guys are doing." He also noted that he has three years to finish school.

Jalen indicated that he saw his role at college like many of the other research participants. He stated the following:

> I saw this both a mission and a job. First, as a mission because, you know, like I said first, I wanted to come to college to not only better myself, but to better my family, and so, currently, that is still my mission, you know.

Gill also commented on the importance of his reason for being in college. He expressed his feelings in the following way:

> I guess my purpose here is just I'm trying to better myself, especially with a growing economy. Where some businesses rely on you having some kind of degree, whether it goes toward that job [sic] , . . . and for me, I think it's a personal goal because no one in my direct bloodline has ever gone to college. So, I'm the first one going to college. The bar was already set high for me with all the military in my family, and now I'm just trying to raise it even higher with military and college, saying, it can be done, whichever path I want to go.

When Nick was asked if he viewed college as a job or mission, he responded, "Definitely. That's how I look at it. This is my mission. I'm here to graduate, and I need to do these things in order to graduate."

Carl talked about the importance of mission and responsibility. He described the college process as his mission as follows:

> Right for me, it's the mission. If I end up at someone's house, a group of nineteen year olds cause we have physics homework, so be it. We have physics homework. And that happened to me the other day. A group of us--like five of us. "Oh, we're going to your house to do homework." OK, alright. So I just showed up at this person's house, and we did our physics homework.

Carl also mentioned that traditional-aged students don't always appear to have a purpose. He observed:

> I mean, a lot of kids straight out of high school, they're . . . I mean some of them want to be here, but some of them, their parents made them come here. Some of them didn't know what else to do with their lives, and so, they don't really have a purpose, you know, and they flounder around and like, "Oh, I hate this class, I have that class." But then you find that the older people, the people with kids, people that have been in the military, they are at the library, studying. They are accomplishing what they set out to do because they want to be here.

James provided a slightly different perspective on mission. From a military perspective, he talked about the importance of service member support and a different mission perspective in college: He stated:

> Most of the time in the military, most especially in combat situations, you're going to have three different options, three different strategies, and three contingencies. We like straight black and white lines of attack or tactics. . . . Now, you have all these different ways of attacking one situation or problem.

Winning and success. From the beginning of basic training through the end of a service member's military obligation, he or she is programmed to win. Each level of training is a step in an overall "win strategy." Therefore, the military-focused attributes of discipline, training, development, proficiency, professionalism, and others are designed to support the ultimate goal of winning. Student veterans move from a military environment where winning is typically defined well, and losing is not a consideration. James described his military expectations that drive his student veteran thinking:

> In the military and war, you either win or lose, which is a survive or die mentality. We were driven to succeed cause there is no failing. You fail in the military or combat, and people die. So, it's really real. And you bring that back; a lot of veterans will bring that back to the educational world or on campus, got to win. I've got to succeed at all costs; it's got to be perfect.

James also indicated that for him and others, student veterans carry a huge burden to succeed and win in their higher education transition. They simply don't

understand anything else. However, James also expressed the challenges with the transition to college:

> We feel naked. There's not a blanket of security for us. We're all alone. You don't have a team anymore. You don't have camaraderie. You don't have the support. And now you are being asked to come to an environment and succeed all by yourself. We are trained to win, so we want to get the mission done and want to do it in a timely manner. We want all of those things.

In a focus group, a student veteran discussed the wide array of choices a college student has. He elaborated on the overwhelming nature of the directions a student veteran could take. Specifically, he stated:

> Well, we've been tunnel-visioned. James was just saying we have three options and a contingency plan, and now we're given thirty-three more. But, outside of the school realm, another person might have sixty-four ways of doing it. So, it's not that it's overwhelming, it's just the transition. It depends on what your time frame for transition was. I mean mine, I was still active duty while I was in school. I was on terminal leave. So, the transition, it depends on what you're doing.

James also expressed concerns about the importance of succeeding as a student veteran. He indicated that he had to take the initiative to reach out to professors and

build relationships in order to "get on the level of everyone here in the educational environment." He noted that he asked "good solid questions" in class. He made sure he went to professors' offices during their office hours. He noted that his proactive approach to the transition process relieved some stress and made him feel better. Unfortunately, he indicated that type of initiative "is not in every veteran."

In this section of the chapter, research participants discussed their sense of purpose, sense of belonging as student veterans on a college campus, and the approach used in a military to college context. Military training often required service members to plan and make adjustments in decision-making and action. The ability to adapt to new environments is a significant aspect of military thinking and planning.

Adaptability

As examined in the previous section, military planning includes a contingency option(s) in the event unexpected conditions develop. When moving into a new environment, service members are trained to adapt to changing conditions. Such adaptability is essential for the unexpected possibilities of a particular mission, or life itself. In an analysis of student transition needs, Tom presented an interesting argument about the importance for student veterans to assume more responsibility for their transitions:

> I mean, *really* [emphasis added]. Veterans are supposed to be adaptable. Soldiers are, marines are--supposed to be adaptable. I don't blame anything on the university to be honest with you. I don't see it as a

> problem [sense of belonging] for the university necessarily; veterans, of course, are a source of secured income. You know, I realize that. Veterans go to school the entire year, for sure. The G.I. Bill will pay for it, so it's important. I don't know; we're all grownups. They should be able to get through it. Like, it's just like when I hear other veterans say they didn't like it, couldn't stick it out or something, that makes me upset. Like why? Like because you didn't get along with people in school? I didn't get along with people in the army sometimes, so I kind of see a little bit more responsibility on the veterans' part.

During the remainder of the response to this analysis, Tom appeared to make a distinction about the opportunity in the Veterans Resource Center (VRC) to get certain types of needs met. "But, I mean, the VRC is quite an excellent place- for veterans to come to hang out. We have different events in here, like, each person's responsibility to do what they need to do. And some people need a little more help."

As a military reserves service member, Nick discussed his initial enrollment in college, subsequent military enlistment, and deployment as a student. He noted each required an ability to adapt to changing circumstances in his transition back to college from deployment.

> After my freshman, first semester, I enlisted in the Guard [National Guard]. And the following fall semester, I came back and resumed school. And basically from the time I did that, up until last semester, is

> when I was just doing school and had the deployment come up. So, coming back from a deployment standpoint, it's like you get your challenges, or whatever, based off the amount of time that you have notification of when you'll be returning at this date. Can you or will you be able to make arrangements to go back to school and further your education?

Cade made arrangements to coordinate the completion of his military obligation with an appropriate time to return to school at SFA. His enlistment was to be completed in March, and he extended his military contract to enroll in SFA during the fall semester. He described his plan as follows:

> No matter what path the military had taken me, I did get to extend my contract for six months and go to Germany. . . . But I figured, I joined in March, so that March time frame; if I would have come back to school during March, it would have been middle of the semester. I would have to wait for either summer or fall. Did the six months extension, and it put me coming out of the military in August; the end of August; so it all worked out pretty well for me.

Service

Service is a foundation word with military people. As noted earlier in the chapter, an enlistment obligation commits an individual to defend and support the constitution of

the United States. Without specifically using the word, the implication of and commitment to service begins at that point. Veterans are conditioned to serve, and many have that need to continue that commitment. In the second focus group, there was an analysis of things a student veteran could do to develop or promote a sense of belonging on a college campus. When they leave the military and enter college, many veterans feel they have lost their service-related opportunities. A student veteran first discussed his military service and indicated that when he left the military, he left everything. He was so committed to his enlistment service and defense purpose, he didn't understand what might be left in life. Some students struggle with that loss of purpose and service role. He stated:

> The VRC associated with SFA brought back the inclusion. So, I'm like, okay, maybe there is another purpose, whether it be helping veterans, whether it be, you know, for example, letting our story continue so others actually understand. And it brought back some light because after my last deployment, there was not a life worth living anymore. I'm like there's nothing left. You know, I gave my all to what I love.

Another student veteran quickly entered the discussion and gave his perspective about service. He interjected:

> *Service* [emphasis added]. That's what veterans are. That's what the military instills in you. You want to serve something greater than yourself. That's the problem with all these myths and stuff. Civilians

> think that the military is complex, and the civilian world is easy. The problem is the military [service] is the norm for us, and the civilian sector is the absolute most complex thing that you could imagine.

Nick also talked about the importance of service to a veteran. He noted that service is a part of the veteran identity, and student veterans continue to look for those opportunities. He explained the need to serve in the following way: "That's what the military is. That's what the army is. Yeah, definitely. You want to continue that. You want to do stuff that betters people and helps people cause that's what we do by nature."

Sense of Belonging

Earlier in the chapter, I presented information from interviews and focus groups that examined age differences and maturity levels as transition challenges for student veterans. Those challenges could certainly be examined in a "sense of belonging" or social adjustment context. As adults, student veterans could certainly feel out of place on a college campus because as examined, their ages, maturity levels, seriousness, and responsibilities differ greatly from most traditional-aged college students. Many student veterans who were interviewed referred to younger students as kids.

Many earlier interview quotes contain the distinction made between student veterans and traditional-aged students. Some student veterans who were interviewed specifically indicated they felt or had felt out of place on campus. Alaina stated, "At first, like the first year, I felt like I didn't belong here." She indicated she did not feel she belonged until she met other student veterans. James indicated that he felt like "a fraud"

and “didn’t consider myself a student until probably the very end of my senior year.” Tim indicated that he doesn’t associate or socialize with students in his classes. He noted that from the class discussions, it seemed he was the only one with “real world experience.” He felt no sense of belonging on campus and said, “I don’t feel one way or the other like I belong or don’t belong. I’m kind of right there in the middle.”

Nick’s perspective on belonging was different than the views expressed by Tim and James. His military background was, and is, service in the Army National Guard. Nick began as a first-time SFA student in a fall semester, left SFA, enlisted in the Army National Guard and returned to school the following fall semester. He had some perspective about college when he returned full time. Although Nick is military “through and through,” he did not experience the extended period of time between high school graduation and college that other student veterans had. Nick established a way to feel a sense of belonging on campus. He stated:

> I feel a sense of belonging just by the fact of being engaged, being engaged in different programs and activities and stuff. Like, I got to explain before, working with those girls [in a college pageant] to further them and better them. I think that is something a lot more veterans need to do as far as getting engaged with school activities and stuff instead of isolating themselves, which is not really good. It just like a bummer, you know.

Jalen provided insight about the sense of belonging he feels on campus. As with other research participants, Jalen's sense of belonging came from camaraderie with other student veterans and the time they shared at the VRC. He stated:

> I don't want to say we have cliques, but when you come to college, I do feel, of course, on the SFA campus, there's [sic] students, and then there's [sic] veterans. You know, as a student coming onto the college campus, everybody wants to talk about whatever--school, parties, where they're from. But what about the veterans? You know, I can't talk to . . . civilians or a regular person and say, "Hey, you know basic training, AIT [Advanced Individual Instruction], deployment, this benefit, that benefit. They'll just look at you, like what are you talking about? So, it definitely is something beneficial and something important to us because it definitely does give you that necessary, you know, center to talk to people that understand you, instead of talking to another person where they have *no* [emphasis added] idea where you're coming from.

The student veterans offered particular views about their sense of belonging. As noted, most student veterans emphasized the need to connect with other student veterans. As indicated in a different section of the chapter, Alaina felt a social gap between her and younger students. She suggested the social gap was a result of the difference in maturity levels. She noted that, as an older person, she wanted to spend time with or

socialize with people her own age. In her interview, she indicated she didn't feel she belonged at SFA until she met other veterans at on campus:

> At first, like the first year, I felt like I didn't belong here. But, finally, realizing that I had the VRC, and there were other veterans like me, it made me feel more at home. Otherwise, I think without the VRC here, I would probably be out of here. Because, being the older person, you kind of want to stick with that same age group. Or, being a veteran, you want to stick with a veteran.

Jalen discussed the importance of spending time with, getting answers from, and just simply communicating with other veterans. He talked about the subtle differences between younger college students and veterans, indicating that in conversations between student veterans and traditional-aged students, there were different languages spoken. Many veterans often made comments that contains words or acronyms that addressed deep and significant meanings. For example, in a conversation, a U.S. Army Vietnam veteran said, "I walked point with a dog. I earned my CIB (Combat Infantryman Badge)." Another example of significant-meaning expressions that veterans use is the phrase "I raised my right hand." Both Cade and Nick used that description for the service members' oath of enlistment. Carl said, "I love the vet center that we have here cause we have a little place we can call our own, and we sit and talk to people that, you know, speak the same language." Tim addressed the significance of the "veteran language" and the underlying experiences they represented:

> The information [in the VRC] is a great social community. Like we got . . . there's definitely . . . a lot of things we discuss, you know. But we all understand. We get along great. It's such a good time. If you're not a vet, you just wouldn't understand. We have people come in here that are not vets, and they hear us talking, and they're just like laughing. What's going on over here? And we just kind of like it that way. Never mind. They just don't understand. It's a veteran thing.

A focus group participant discussed the veteran bond and the language used to characterize it. He stated:

> I really think most of us, we don't see, you know, the soldier, the marine, the airman, squid--whatever you want to call us. We see, you know, our blood is all green. We mess with each other ten-fold. We may disagree with each other, but at the end of the day, we, you know, we're still a family connected through service, and that's a bond that can't be broken.

Cade discussed his view of the bond that knits student veterans together. He offered his perspective in the following way:

> The whole thing was, we were just part of the biggest gang ever. I mean even the biggest established gang in the world . . . is a military . . . whatever branch it is, it is still your brothers and sisters. . . . I guess I could correlate it to . . . a fraternity or a sorority kind of thing.

Gerald talked about the bond of trust he places in student veterans. He indicated that trust begins with responsibility:

> Yeah, responsibility is a big one. I think that's a big difference between--one of the bigger things--you can trust veterans more I feel than traditional college students. I guess, like when we're working in group work, I've got a couple of older guys and veterans, and I think age is a big thing because they've been out on their own, and they have that self-responsibility.

James also suggested that veterans are bound together by their commitment to service. He noted that during his transition to college, he had a vision of a community on the SFA campus where student veterans could meet and spend time together. That place became the SFA Veterans Resource Center.

Veterans Resource Center

The Veterans Resource Center (VRC) was born of a need for student veterans on the SFA campus to have a place to socialize and obtain support from people with similar life experiences. Earlier in the chapter, research participants discussed the lack of connectivity with younger students because of age differences, life experiences, and maturity levels. The VRC became the nucleus where student veterans could study, obtain information, relax, laugh, cry, and lean on each other.

The VRC began as a small passionate flame that was fueled into a campus initiative. During a quarterly meeting of the SFA Board of Regents in the Fall 2011 semester, a group of student veterans appeared before the governing body and asked for a separate, dedicated space on campus where they could study and socialize. The regents agreed and directed the administration to locate and develop a dedicated campus space for the VRC. The location was selected in the heart of the SFA campus. Approximately 1,300 square feet of space in the SFA student center was re-purposed for the VRC. The university provided tables, chairs, couches, a large screen television, and computers in the center for student veterans.

Word quickly spread throughout the SFA student veteran community about the VRC. Student veterans of all ages, genders, and races began to use the VRC as a social and information hub. Older veterans on campus visited the center often and were welcomed as being part of the "veteran family." The information that student veterans in transition desired was available through the center. Gerald gave his perspective about the role of the VRC:

> I definitely like having the VRC here. I definitely think it's a big thing. I looked online when I was looking at enrolling, and I saw the Veterans Center here and the veterans' people at the admissions office . . . so, I think that's huge and I think that's a big help.

Gerald elaborated further about the VRC:

> I think the VRC is more of a place of belonging; to socialize is what we do here. . . . You . . . got the TV; people are talking, so it's not really so much a place to study for me. But, I think it definitely helps a lot with that place of belonging.

Veterans who were either about to enroll at SFA or new student veterans who were attempting to negotiate the transition were often accompanied to departments by other student veterans to receive admissions guidance, academic advising, financial aid, counseling, and other specific guidance. Nick talked about the first time he walked into the VRC, and someone called him brother. He elaborated on the VRC openness to student veterans:

> You have to have a level of trust to come into, especially coming in from the outside as a military veteran student. You come in this center, and you see people who open their arms up to you, like, "What's going on brother?" Like, you have that trust, like whoa. "He called me brother. Why?" And then you realize you're a veteran. That's why he called me brother . . . you've done what I've done . . . you've been there. You've served.
>
> Like, I can literally say, "That guy is alright. He took his hand and raised it just like I did."

When asked to describe the importance of the VRC to student veterans, he elaborated further:

> Like a brotherhood. Brotherhood, team, you know . . . I'm with my platoon; it's who I've been with for however long. I feel like, these are just my family. It's home.

As another example of the VRC's role in information-sharing, Nick indicated after his reserve deployment ended, he checked with the VRC to get the information he needed to re-enroll in school. He answered a question about college reenrollment challenges after deployment, and he stated how he obtained help from the VRC:

> [Reenrollment caused challenges] . . . I reached out to my resources; . . . the VRC here, in the school, . . . and let him know, "Hey, I'm coming back, and what are some things I need to check--kind of like a little agenda list, or whatever?" . . . he kind of steered me in the right direction.

Angie described the VRC in a way that was different from the other research participants. She called it a safe house:

> I'm glad it's here. . . . It's almost like a safe house. I mean, you can go look out there [In the student center]; it's you know, eating talking or whatever. . . . . But, it's like we can come into this little safe house and get away from that. Just sit here and be with other people that are like us and understand us; that are a little closer in age . . . , and we can have a

> conversation and not get offended when we say something this way instead of that way.

Gill talked about his perceptions of his belonging as a student. He indicated there were days when "I sit in class and, you know, I feel like I'm not there. Everybody else is carrying on conversations." They want to talk to the person next to them, but I feel like sometimes I am invisible to them. I'm still trying to get used to, I guess belonging. The only time I feel really comfortable is when we're in the VRC. Cause it's just us. More vets.

Jalen talked about the importance of the VRC to him. Part of its appeal is the welcoming aspect of the center. Jalen elaborated:

> The VRC definitely has helped me to feel like I belong here because we also have a Facebook group, and James definitely posts different things on there, you know, whether it's benefits, whether it's things going on around the SFA campus, whether it's finding out ways to get involved. . . . You know, it's always that one source . . . like, "If you don't know, I'm willing to find it out for you." . . . You can walk in there, you can find someone you never known [sic], have a conversation with them. . . . find out about them.

Larry talked about the importance of trust that student veterans need and find in the VRC. He indicated a veteran's most important need is the military family. Larry

spent a lot of time every day at the VRC between classes. He articulated the VRC's importance to him as follows:

> Even though we're not there anymore; . . . we're not that soldier, that sailor, that airman, or marine; our family ties are still the biggest thing of our life. Knowing there's a veteran there we can call at a moment's notice. My anxiety is, wait, I need to talk to someone. We're more apt to talk to another veteran than we are a counselor because most of us are afraid that counselor is gonna be like, "You're nuts. What are you doing here? You're nuts." So we need that family.

Alaina also talked about the importance of the VRC. She noted that it is a location where there is someone to talk to who is knowledgeable about student veterans' concerns or problems. It is a place where student veterans feel comfortable. She further stated that the VRC was a place:

> Where it feels safe to you. It's quiet. Some days it might not be quiet, but other times, it's quiet. You speak to others just like you. It's kind of like if you're sitting out there in the student center itself, you're surrounded, and some days it's packed full of kids. You can't take the noise. At least in here, those doors and all this glass, it blocks all that noise off, so you can concentrate and think clearly on your school work or life itself.

Tom added to the analysis and importance of the VRC. He observed that the center served different purposes for student veterans. He indicated that in addition to serving as a social networking hub, the VRC also functioned as an information center. When asked to describe the VRC's importance, he stated:

> It's real important, you know. Guys come in here all the time and say, "Hey, I'm gonna take a geology class, or hey I'm gonna do this, and I have this professor I'm signed up for; . . . what do I need to do?" Or anything like that. It's extremely important, I would say, cause like I said, I didn't know nothing about college.

Tim also discussed the social need for a VRC on campus. Earlier, I included concerns he had about the age and maturity differences existing between student veterans and traditional-aged students. For him, the VRC is a place where "like-minded" people can socialize and "hang out." Tim indicated that all veterans are welcome in the VRC, regardless of the military branch they served in. He had some additional comments about the VRC:

> I love it here. I come in here almost every day, sit down, chat, grab some lunch before I go to my classes. It's just awesome. You can tell our war stories, and it's like, I got plenty of friends who don't understand why it's [the story] funny, but the guys in here understand why it's funny.

Tim also discussed the importance of information sharing in the VRC. He obtained a lot of detailed G.I. Bill information from "regulars" in the VRC. Although his advisor had told him, he had forgotten that student veterans were allowed to register early. In a VRC registration conversation, he was reminded of that registration privilege.

Carl also discussed the social support structure of the VRC. He indicated the most significant need a student veteran had was to have a trusting environment and said:

> Where you can congregate and kind of separate yourself from the general population of the school. . . . That is why I love the vet center that we have here cause we have a little place we can call our own, and we sit and talk to people that, you know, speak the same language. . . . You know, it's a brotherhood.

Carl went on to say:

> When you walk in here [VRC], you can just be yourself completely. It's like a place where you can let your filters go. You can talk about your missions that you had. Or you can talk about whatever, and no one gets hurt or offended. Everyone knows where you're coming from. I've always looked at this place kind of like a community of support . . . I've seen people break down and cry in here. It's because their disgust is killing them, you know, so to speak. And people kind of band around and say, "Hey, you're going to be OK."

The background Carl provided underscored his perspective that the VRC serves as a social support function for student veterans who bring varied and diverse life experiences.

Larry talked about the social structure of the VRC, and the benefits it offers to student veterans. He stated, "When we have the VRC, it keeps us here. And it keeps us with what we know, who we know; it creates that bond, that brotherhood." Larry also indicated that those who frequented the VRC and graduate keep in contact with student veterans still in school. He often keeps up with them on Facebook, or they talk by phone. . . . [The VRC] It's everything a veteran needs and then some.

Summary

A number of themes emerged from the personal interviews and focus group sessions. The first is the adult responsibilities veterans face as college students. Many living expenses were supported by the military. Some veterans suggest they are adrift without the structure and support the military provided. Living needs such as, food, housing, health care, and insurance were generally provided. When living decisions needed to be made, there was information and guidance that directed or supported those choices.

With the loss of that structure and support, student veterans must make provisions for various types of living expenses. A concern expressed by many of the veterans is that several of these living choices were either made for them, or the paternalistic military culture guided necessary decisions. As adult college students, they

must make provisions for food, obtain housing, and support all of the costs associated with a residence. Depending on the type of housing they select, that can include some type of residency payment, utilities, insurance, and possible maintenance. They no longer have the same type of support structure to rely on for decision-making.

Student veterans who have families must also make decisions that provide for and support family members. In addition to the basic living requirements, student veterans who have children must make arrangements for childcare. Those decisions include the selection of the facility and the coordination of college and facility scheduling. Moreover, children often require significant health care attention as they develop and mature.

The interviews and focus groups also pointed out the environmental adaptions that student veterans must manage as they transition to college. It is also significant, according to the data; that transitions can continue. There is no clearly identified point at which a student veteran might say he or she has successfully transitioned to college. Some of the environmental concerns that student veterans face appear to be within the context of belonging.

Most research participants pointed to age and maturity differences as transition concerns. The movement from a rigid, closed military structure to an open college environment with unlimited choices also created a challenge for some of the research participants. Another concern of some research participants was their level of academic preparedness. Many felt somewhat unprepared for certain academic pathways.

In the academic context, there seems to be a student veteran concern about academic advising. Many research participants indicated they lacked information about academic majors and careers. That led to a deeper evaluation of student veteran needs. Student veterans expressed a concern about uncertainty. Research participants indicated they needed as much information about the college environment as possible to make current and future life decisions.

The data I collected from the personal interviews and focus groups highlighted some significant concerns for veterans who are in a transition process to college. The data suggest that all research participants shared common concerns such as age difference issues. However, the data also indicate that a student veteran's particular military experiences could shape his or her transition to college. For example, the data suggest that female student veterans have transition concerns that are very comprehensive. Chapter V will present broad themes and discuss those in a detailed context of student veteran transition challenges.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY

In this chapter, I will present an analysis of the findings from the data in Chapter IV. I used the study's theoretical framework components that included adult-transition theory and multiple dimensions of identity theory to analyze the data. As later described in greater detail, the transition of veterans to college will utilize Schlossberg's (1984) adult-transition theory as a foundation that describes transition as an event or nonevent that changes roles, routines, and relationships within a context of person's work, family, health, or financial situation. The chapter will also apply adult-transition research by Sargent and Schlossberg (1988) and adult-learner research presented by Schlossberg, Lynch, and Chickering (1989). I will also examine research participant data through a multiple dimensions of identity theory lens developed by Jones and McEwen (2000), McEwen (2003), and Abes, Jones, and McEwen (2007). The chapter will also apply adult-transition theory research provided by Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson (2006).

Chapter V Caveats

There are some caveats and acknowledgments that must be pointed out. In the chapter, I will refer to service members, veterans, and student veterans. Within the context of this study, service members are considered to be military personnel on active military duty, veterans describes those in transition from the military to college, and student veterans are considered veterans who have enrolled in college. In this study,

research participants offered personal college transition issues that impacted them as service members, veterans, or student veterans. There are certainly differences among veterans as there are among the general societal population. Moreover, those differences were evident in Chapter IV's research. The research participants' experiences have been guided and determined by their life roles. Therefore, there is no intended presumption that all veterans and/or student veterans have identical needs. Nor is it my intention to suggest all veterans have identical transition challenges.

For purposes of this study, I have considered the traditional-aged college student population to be between eighteen and twenty-four years old. Using adult-transition theory as a guide, this study's position is that a student veteran's transition to college does not have a clearly identified beginning point. A veteran's transition to college may begin while he or she is in the military, and the student veteran transition may continue until he or she graduates from college. According to Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson (2006), transitions occur in stages, and each stage adapts and adjusts for a successful move to the next. Therefore, veteran and student veteran transition to college will be presented as an ongoing, dynamic process.

I will present, in this data analysis chapter, three themes that emerged from the data collection in this study. The three themes are: navigation of realigned adult responsibilities, identity transformation and development, and life purpose expansion through environmental adaptation. The themes, fluid and inter-related, were developed with the use of the study's theoretical framework components, adult-transition theory

and multiple dimensions of identity theory. Categories contained within different themes may overlap. The study's themes and sub-themes are presented in Appendix C.

Similarly, the theoretical framework components of adult-transition theory and multiple dimensions of identity theory may intersect and overlap. Moreover, information emerging from the study overlaps and fits within different themes. For example, using the theoretical framework lens, certain student veteran transition issues may be related to an adult-transition process and an identity management process. Using research data as an example, participants discussed age differences between student veterans and traditional-aged students as a college transition concern. Using an adult-transition theory lens, most student veterans consider themselves as adults that are out of place on campus around "kids." From a multiple dimensions of identity theory perspective, student veterans expressed identity conflict in a higher education environment that was designed for traditional-aged students. The two components intersect to provide a more expansive view of student veteran transition.

The purpose of the chapter is to utilize the theoretical framework to help explain the student veteran transition challenges. I will provide background and perspective that examines student veteran transition challenges viewed through the lens of the theoretical framework. Although the theoretical framework components were discussed in detail in Chapter II and reintroduced in this chapter's beginning, I will again provide a summary perspective. The section that follows reexamines adult-transition theory.

Adult-transition Theory

In Chapter II, I explored adult-transition theory and presented particular elements of the theory that would serve as a research foundation for this study. For context, I will revisit findings from Schlossberg (1984) that are referenced in Chapter II. She maintained the transition framework must be examined as to type, context, and impact. Moreover, Schlossberg (1984) argued that as a concept, transition encompasses terms such as crisis, transformation, and change. In the context of this study, adult transition is regarded as an event or non-event that causes changes in relationships, routines, and roles (Schlossberg, 1984).

Aspects of adult-transition theory particularly relevant to the examination of the transition of military veterans to college were findings presented earlier by Schlossberg (1984). Research (Bridges, 2004) was also used in the study to examine transition phases as *endings*, *neutral zones*, and *beginnings*. Schlossberg, Lynch and Chickering (1989) also contributed adult-learner research that analyzed higher education transition stages as *moving in*, *moving through*, and *moving on*. Lastly, the Four-S transition model that Sargent and Schlossberg (1988) developed was used extensively to evaluate student veterans transition from standpoints of *situation*, *self*, *support*, and *strategies*. In addition to adult-transition theory, the second component of the theoretical framework used to analyze data is multiple dimensions of identity theory.

Multiple Dimensions of Identity Theory

In Chapter II, I presented the foundational aspects of multiple dimensions of identity theory (MDIT), drawn from a conceptual model developed by Jones and McEwen (2000). MDIT is also supported by additional research by McEwen (2003) and a model reconceptualization by Abes, Jones, and McEwen (2007). Jones and McEwen (2000) found that a single identity dimension was unacceptably narrow and argued that identity could only be understood from a multi-dimensional perspective. The model developed by Jones and McEwen (2000) is dynamic and represents continuous identity construction influenced by different contexts.

The theoretical framework components were seminal in the development of this study. Both adult-transition theory and multiple dimensions of identity theory provided meaningful research lenses that guided my study. The theoretical framework helped align student veterans' adult and military identity attributes. Some research participants' transition concerns included age and maturity differences between student veterans and traditional-aged students, the absence of structure in a higher educational environment, and a lack of belonging, among others. In this chapter, the first theme I will analyze is the navigation of realigned adult responsibilities.

Navigation of Realigned Adult Responsibilities

Many enlisted service members enter the military immediately or shortly after they complete high school. Most research participants in this study entered the military immediately after high school. At that time in their life, adult perspectives and

responsibilities are still developing. According to a report from the Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (2012), 48.8% of active duty enlisted personnel are twenty-five years of age or younger. Almost all necessary living expenses are provided by the military. To support basic living necessities, the military provides food, housing, health care, and insurance for single, enlisted service members. Enlisted service members who are married also receive food and housing allowances, health care, and insurance. Thus, the military provides basic "shelter" needs, and certain decisions about living expenses are not required or are minimized.

Consequently, as veterans begin the first part of their adult life with many structured, "shelter" benefits provided, they come to rely on that level of support. However, it must be pointed out, that the "living expense benefits" are provided to enable service members to focus on their respective military roles, responsibilities and functions. In addition to living expense benefits, military service members' lives are directed by assignment orders. Some service members request and are approved for certain assignments, most are simply directed by orders. Additionally, military orders govern the period of time a service member spends at a particular duty assignment. Thus, military support and structure form boundary shelters around service members. As a result, many adult life decisions are made or provided for by the military. The next section uses adult-transition theory to examine transition challenges when a veteran moves from a paternalistic, structured military environment to an open, unstructured higher education civilian environment.

As noted in an earlier chapter, twelve research participants were used in the study. Nine served in an active duty capacity and three served as reservists. The student veteran research participants were between twenty-three and forty years of age. Adult-transition theory will be used to examine student veterans' navigation of realigned adult responsibilities and its components. The two major sub-themes that emerged include negotiating life management issues and development of an information, communication network, and support system.

Negotiating Life Management Issues

Finances. Most research participants expressed concerns about their finances as student veterans. Those who had been active duty service members relied on a predictable level of income during their service period. Most research participants discussed the reliance and expectation that active duty service members place on living and shelter expenses the military provides. Reservists who had been deployed on active duty received the same level of pay and shelter support while they were on active duty, as did their active service member peers. With the transition to college, student veterans had to adjust from a stable level of income and living support to a primary reliance on the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill (PGIB). Many research participants indicated that the change in financial support and the resulting financial stress was a significant college transition concern.

Research corroborated the student veteran financial transition concern. According to Badger and McCuddy (2014) financial stress is linked to a student

veteran's college transition. Their study noted that the loss of food expense support, housing, and health benefits contributed to difficult transition challenges for student veterans. Wheeler (2012) also noted that while student veterans wait for federal benefits to be activated, the loss of a predictable military paycheck can create financial hardships. A study by Steele, Salcedo, and Coley (2010), noted in a survey of two-hundred student veterans, approximately forty percent indicated that receiving PGIB benefits was a moderate or major challenge. The report also noted that PGIB payments were several months late in some student veterans' first semester. In a study by Wurster, Rinaldi, Woods, and Liu (2013) the researchers indicated student veterans were frustrated with PGIB benefits delays and the process that was necessary to resolve the issue. Some student veterans in this study indicated they held part-time jobs to be able to manage college and living expenses.

Student veteran financial analysis using adult-transition theory. I will utilize Schlossberg (1984) and Sargent and Schlossberg (1988) adult-transition theory to analyze the life negotiation data obtained from research participants in this study. First, veterans and student veterans are involved in a college transition process that can be described as follows:

> Transition…is defined broadly as any event or nonevent that results in change in relationships, routines, assumptions, and/or roles within the settings of self, work, family, health, and/or economics (Schlossberg, 1984, p. 43).

As noted by the research participants in the previous section, the movement from the military to college offered an opportunity to align the process with adult-transition theory presented by Schlossberg (1984). Furthermore, adult-transition theory is applicable using the Sargent and Schlossberg (1988) 4-S model that uses *situation, self, support*, and *strategy* components. A veteran and student veteran engages the college transition process by evaluating the *situation* as the movement from the military to college, the *self* component as their ability to negotiate the transition, the evaluation of any necessary *support* that is needed to assist the transition, and the *strategy* used to engage the process. In what follows, I will discuss the strategies research participants utilized in managing financial adjustments in college.

Student veteran strategies to manage financial transition issues. Research participants used different transition strategies to manage particular types of financial issues. After enrollment, Tim had to wait while his PGIB benefits were being processed. That included payment for his tuition and fees, housing allowance and book stipend. His engagement strategy was to contact the veterans' counselor, his class professors, and landlord, explain his veteran situation, and get support to resolve the temporary financial concerns. Angie relied on social *support* until she resolved financial transition issues. Larry's *strategy* was to obtain a loan to pay for failed classes not covered by the PGIB. In addition to student veteran financial transition concerns, there are other life management issues.

Family management. In addition to financial anxieties, this study's student veterans who had families also expressed concerns about family management issues. As

noted in an earlier chapter, three research participants, twenty-five percent, were married. Larry and Alaina were husband and wife, and Angie was married to an active duty military service member. Angie had three children and Larry and Alaina had one child. For comparison purposes, Whitley, Tschudi, and Gieber (2013) reported that approximately sixty-two percent of undergraduate student veterans are married and/or have a child. Of that sixty-two percent, thirty-three percent are married with a child or children, fifteen percent of married couples have no children, and fourteen percent are single parents (Whitley, Tschudi, & Gieber, 2013). A distinction made between military families and student veteran families is that, according to Kelty, Kleykamp, and Segal (2010), military service members with families have free medical care, housing privileges, and available child care. Moreover, almost all military Child Development Centers are accredited (Kelty, Kleykamp, & Segal, 2010).

Research participants in this study who were married with children expressed particular concerns about their ability to manage child care. Angie's husband, who lived outside of the region, was not directly involved in the child care for their three children. It became her responsibility to oversee their care. Angie engaged the 4-S Sargent and Schlossberg (1988) adult-transition model, evaluated her *situation*, developed *support*, and engaged a transition *strategy*. Angie's strategy to help leverage her finances and obtain child care required her to move into her husband's parents' home. Her in-laws take care of her three children while she is in school. Although that relieved some financial concerns, Angie struggled with her sense of family responsibility.

As a mature thirty-year old college student, she indicated she felt like a teenager who had to rely on parents for support. Although she was extremely grateful for their support, that reliance caused some concerns. She wondered if she should simply quit college and be a full-time stay-at-home mother. She indicated that she questioned what she was doing on a daily basis. As Angie's family situation is viewed through the Sargent and Schlossberg (1988) 4-S lens, the application of the *situation*, *self*, *support*, and *strategies* can continue in the student veteran transition process.

As a married student veteran couple, Larry and Alaina's *strategy* is to utilize local child care. In addition to financial costs of the child care, they sometimes encounter schedule conflicts between classes and child care facility hours of operation. They share responsibilities for getting their daughter to the child care facility, and for picking her up at the end of the day. As individuals, the research participants managed family concerns and support needs in different ways. As family members they developed *coping* strategies to address student veteran family management concerns.

As in Angie's case, the *support* component of the 4-S model can be provided by family members. Research participants who had family *support* still maintained ownership of their life management responsibilities. As a former reservist, Angie relied on a sixty percent PGIB support level and her husband's military pay for college expenses. When Tom moved from the military to college at SFA, he stayed with his mother for a period of time. Gill also stayed with his father while he attended the first semester of college. For a period of time, Tim and his sister shared an apartment while she was in college.

In addition to the application of the Schlossberg (1984) and Sargent and Schlossberg (1988) adult-transition theory models, the research participants' life management negotiations reflected an intersection with the Schlossberg, Lynch and Chickering (1989) model of *moving out*, *moving into* and *moving on*. Theoretical intersections occurred as Angie *moved out* of the military and *moved into* college and engaged the Sargent and Schlossberg (1988) *situation*, *self*, *support* and *strategy* components of the 4-S model. Similarly, as Alaina and Larry *moved out* of the navy, they operated within the adult-transition theory frame as individuals and a family. In their respective situations, as Tom, Gill, and Tim *moved out* of active duty and *moved into* the higher education environment, they engaged the Sargent and Schlossberg (1988) 4-S model *support* strategy as they utilized family member support. To continue the negotiation of life management issues, I will next analyze the development of a communication network and support system.

Development of an Information, Communication Network, and Support System

Information is very important to student veterans. Most participants in this study emphasized that information was vital for academic decision-making, financial aid, advice, and feedback. As a catalyst, information guides and directs student veterans as they work through the transition process from the military to college. For example, some research participants discussed the information-gathering approach they used to enroll at Stephen F. Austin State University (SFA). Using the university's web site, the research participants noted they obtained admission information and veterans' services

information. From that first bit of information, the individuals made personal campus contacts, enrollment decisions, and began the transition process from the military to college. The application of the Sargent and Schlossberg (1988) 4-S model whereby student veterans evaluated their *situation* need for information, considered available *support*, and with a *strategy*, engaged the appropriate campus *support*.

Most research participants expressed appreciation for the information and *support* provided by the SFA veterans support counselor. She was mentioned numerous times as the first point of contact for veterans and she was the person student veterans trusted explicitly for benefits processing and guidance. Many of the research participants were concerned about the uncertainty related to various administrative processing requirements and academic decisions when they enrolled in college. Research indicates this is a common concern. Feldman and March (1981) suggested that a decision is an estimate of uncertain opportunities that hold uncertain future considerations for the decision's consequences. O'Reilly (1982) emphasized the relationship between the quality of information and good decisions. Moreover, he noted that readily available, relevant information, normally improves decision accuracy.

Some study participants' concerns echoed the positions of Feldman and March (1981) and O'Reilly (1982) about the importance of reliable information needed for sound decision-making. Some student veterans expressed concerns about the need for additional academic advising, and emphasized the importance of reliable information and feedback. Three research participants noted they sometimes questioned the academic direction they had taken, and one deliberated about a decision to attend graduate school

after he graduated with his bachelor's degree. To obtain the various types of information that research participants sought, the student veterans developed an information system, a communication network, and a support system using the SFA Veterans Resource Center as an information hub. In that process, student veterans again used an adult-transition *strategy* to develop the type of information network that would provide necessary information for decision-making and guidance. That *strategy* relied on the SFA Veterans Resource Center (VRC) as an information and communication network center.

The SFA Veterans Resource Center (VRC). When the VRC was established, it quickly became a repository of information for student veterans at SFA, veterans who were in transition to the university, and service members in the military who were seeking higher education information. Politi and Street (2010) noted the importance of information and good communication when they indicated that trust, functional expectations, information sharing, and collaboration impact decision making. According to Hawthorne, Baumann and Ross (2013), a student veteran organization (SVO) can help student veterans develop a campus information network that helps promote academic initiatives. Summerlot, Green, and Parker (2009) indicated that student veterans' organizations can help provide both social and information needs.

In this study, research participants discussed the development of the communication network and support system of the SFAVRC. One research participant discussed how the VRC was just beginning when he was deployed. He noted that when he was about to return from active duty, he contacted the VRC to help with reenrollment

issues. When he returned to campus, he stated he was pleased with the VRC's development. All research participants in this study indicated the VRC was essential to enable student veterans to obtain information about classes, majors, professors, financial aid, disability services, and advising.

Information, communication and support. Summerlot, Green, and Parker (2009) noted that student veterans want to connect with other student colleagues who share similar experiences. Through the VRC, student veterans developed a network of information-sharing for other student veterans. In that process, the student veterans evaluated a need (*situation*), developed information and contacts (*strategy*), and used that communication network to *support* student veterans, veterans, and service members. The next section of the chapter presents the second theme, identity transformation and development.

Identity Transformation and Development

Identity is a very complex concept. Lawler (2008) argued that it is not possible to offer a single comprehensive definition of identity and explain how it works. Identity was characterized by Chatman, Eccles, and Malanchuk (2005) as a continuous process that individuals may use to determine, assess, reassess, and reconfirm who they are in relation to others in their respective environments. According to Marcia (2015), identity refers to one's sense of himself or herself on a continuum that contains past experiences, a dynamic direction in the present, and a future trajectory. This theme will draw from that perspective of identity transformation in addition to multiple dimensions of identity

theory advanced by Jones and McEwen (2000), McEwen (2003), and Abes, Jones, and McEwen (2007). Moreover, additional identity development research will be presented in later categorical discussions.

This first section in this theme will examine the notion of military identity, its formation, and its influence on the transition of veterans to college. As one of the theoretical framework components, multiple dimensions of identity theory (MDIT) will be used to examine that transition process. To begin the analysis, the concept of identity will be explored further. McEwen (2003) suggested that identity development is a complex process as one assumes personal and social identities. Jones and McEwen (2000) presented a multiple dimensions of identity representation that reflected ongoing identity development influenced by different contexts. The authors also indicated that one's identity included different but intersecting identity dimensions. Moreover, the MDIT model offers the opportunity to accept the possibility of existing multiple identities as well as multiple dimensions of identity (Jones & McEwen, 2000).

The Military Identity and its Formation

A military identity is created in a purposeful, deliberate manner. The deconstruction of the civilian identity and the creation of the military identity begin in basic training, where recruits undergo physical, mental, and weapons training. Recruits are immersed in the military environment for a period of time before they are allowed to leave the military training base. Baechtold and De Sawal (2009) contended that basic training establishes a pre-assigned identity. There is a rigid regimentation process

designed to indoctrinate recruits into a military way of thinking. Coll, Weiss and Yarvis (2011) suggested that core values such as honor, courage, loyalty, integrity, and commitment serve to unify the military culture. A study by Maringira, Gibson, and Richters (2015) noted the following:

> Military identity is not an official term but it is there. It comes because of two things. First the conduct of day to day life as a soldier. When it gets in your blood you end up having an identity in the way you talk, even in the way you dress and the way you walk. Secondly, if you have fought in war, it is difficult to just erase those memories so you end up with that identity engraved within you for life (Maringira, Gibson, & Richters, 2015, p. 26).

Research supports the strong, pervasive military identity evident in this study's research participants. As indicated, that identity was created in a purposeful manner. For research participants in this study, the formation began in an age range from seventeen to twenty-one years of age. Next, I will examine opportunities to add an identity layer(s) to a military veteran's identity as he or she transitions to college.

The Addition of Identity Layers

As indicated earlier, the purpose of this particular theme is to address student veteran identity transformation and development. Research (Meeus, 2011) suggested that student identity could be added to a formerly acquired military identity to develop a

student veteran identity. Student veteran research participants discussed opportunities to embrace a student identity. One participant helped promote a traditional student group style show and pageant. Two other participants considered joining a social fraternity or sorority; however, one participant decided not to join and another lost interest after becoming a fraternity member. The student veteran who joined a fraternity attributed his loss of interest to age and maturity differences between traditional-aged student fraternity members and himself.

Some student veterans attempted to embrace a student identity, but struggled to do so. Most cited age difference as a reason for not feeling like an accepted member of the student body. One research participant noted strongly that he felt like a "fraud" as an older student veteran. Meeus (2011) pointed out that identity formation included exploration and commitment. He also indicated that exploration examines alternatives in particular identity contexts. Furthermore, Meeus (2011) noted that commitment reflects the degree of choices in identity domains. This study's findings indicate that although some student veterans explored opportunities to connect with the general student body, most did not make either the commitment or the connection to establish a student identity. London, Downey, Bolger, and Velilla (2005) argued that identity reflects core aspects of an individual's self and utilizes life experiences as a lens to view the world. Most research participants in this study noted how their life experiences separated them from traditional-aged students. Moreover, they indicated that age differences, life experiences and their strong military identity challenged the addition of a student identity.

With respect to the progression of identity, McEwen (2003) noted that identity development occurs throughout life. In that progression, the assumption of identity incorporates prior identity development through one's life cycle. Moreover, identity accumulation creates foundational layers for continued identity development (McEwen, 2003). Carlsson, Wangqvist, and Frisen (2015) found that identity development is an ongoing process that can continue into an individual's late twenties. The authors also noted that after commitment-making, identity development considers three dimensional processes: one's approach to life-changing conditions, the extent of meaning-making engagement, and how one's personal life development occurs. Schlossberg, Lynch and Chickering (1989, p. 37) suggested that "…the crisis of identity is reawakened whenever an individual experiences a major transition."

From that perspective, a veteran's transition to college offers the opportunity to add a student veteran identity. However, as formerly pointed out, Meeus (2011) emphasized that commitment serves as an essential element of identity formation or change. Most research participants identified themselves as veterans, rather than student veterans. In that respect, most research participants indicated that military training, culture, and experience created and established their military identity. I will now examine the development of a student veteran identity.

The Development of a Student Veteran Identity

As noted earlier, research participants' military identities accompanied them in their transition to college from the military. Many maintained they would always identity

themselves as veterans. Fadjukoff, Kokko, and Pulkkinen (2010) argued that identity formation is a self-structure that helps enable individual consistency across time and place. The authors further noted that the process influences personal psychosocial advancement and well-being. It should be noted that the expansion from a military identity to a student identity can be influenced by a student veteran's perceived environmental threats.

Cook, Purdie-Vaughns, Garcia, and Cohen (2012) indicated that a school environment can expose individuals to a risk of negative evaluation and rejection, called a social evaluative threat. The authors further noted that an environment viewed as threatening increases vigilance and awareness to cues that indicate threats. Research participants in this study discussed their perception of threats from physical, psychological, academic preparedness, and emotional perspectives. Specific examples cited were perceived threats that related to combat, heightened vigilance, perceptions of threats from crowded conditions, focus issues, and other emotional issues. Cook, Purdie-Vaughns, Garcia, and Cohen (2012) pointed out that heightened vigilance could impact a student's sense of belonging. Arguably, social evaluative threats may be minimized through a proactive student identity development process.

According to Fadjukoff, Kokko, and Pulkkinen (2010), there are possible opportunities for identity commitment to change in association with social conditions and one's personal identity interests. Torres, Howard-Hamilton, and Cooper (2003) contended that the time in college is critical for identity development. Information obtained in this study from student veterans indicates that in addition to a student

veteran's military identity, college campuses can help develop a student identity. The feasibility of that finding was reinforced by Carlsson, Wangqvist, and Frisen (2015), who pointed out that during one's life span, new experiences may challenge one's current sense of identity.

MDIT applied to student identity development. The work of Jones and McEwen (2000) that advances the notion that there are not only dimensional intersections of identity, but also opportunities for multiple identities, offers a chance to examine student identity development through that theoretical framework component. As indicated earlier, most veterans arrive on a college campus with a firmly established military identity. In the next section, I will analyze data that indicates most student veterans' military identity overshadows the perceived need to acquire a student veteran identity.

Most student veterans are reluctant to release their military identity. As noted, most research participants in this study maintained they would always identify themselves as veterans. In an examination of student veteran reservists who were deployed to active duty from college, Livingston and Baumann (2013) noted that student veterans must sometimes maintain two conflicting identities as student and service member. Research participants in my study gave no indication they saw themselves as "student veterans" or students. Most suggested they were veterans in college. In fact, research participants appeared to look for differences and distinctions between themselves and traditional-aged students. In what follows, I will analyze research participant information wherein student veterans point out some of those distinctions.

Most student veterans in my study pointed out differences between themselves and traditional-aged students which included life, age, maturity, and commitment differences. Research participants strongly felt the responsibility and job skills they had in the military created a great separation between themselves and traditional-aged students. In addition to the three combat veterans who experienced aspects of life few encounter, one research participant was a weather forecaster with a top secret security clearance, another was a chemical, biological, radiation and nuclear specialist in Kosovo, another was an intelligence analyst in Iraq, one was a Navy Seabee stationed with the Seventh Fleet, and another was an embassy guard in Moscow, Russia. None of these research participants indicated they considered themselves "student veterans." Most research participants clung to their military identity and suggested their former service experiences as military service members would define them for life.

Livingston, Havice, Cawthon, and Fleming (2011) provided information that supported the data acquired from research participants in my study. Livingston et al. (2011) pointed out that student veterans were more mature, had more life experiences, and recognized age differences between student veterans and traditional-aged students. In fact one participant in their study reflected a similar perspective to research participants in my study:

> We're more focused, more focused on getting our degree, whereas some of them might be more focused on going out and having a good time. So yeah, I was more focused on getting my education done. And it was tempting to go into one of those organizations where they do a lot of

> social activities, but I just decided that wasn't gonna be my focus (Livingston et al. 2011, p.321)

Another identity conflict that most research participants pointed out in my study was communication differences between student veterans and traditional-aged students. Many research participants indicated they spoke very bluntly and directly, and felt that many in the higher education environment did not know how to accept their manner of speaking. They indicated they spoke a "veteran language" that students and the general higher education community did not understand. The communication differences between research participants in my study and their traditional-aged student colleagues was also corroborated as, "…in military circles it may be appropriate to speak very directly and assertively to others, whereas that type of interaction could be perceived as rude or aggressive in college" (Badger & McCuddy , 2014, p. 105).

The examination of the data strongly supports the notion that student veterans are unwilling to let go of their military identity and accept the additional student identity. An opportunity exists at this juncture to view the analysis through the intersected theoretical framework components of adult-transition theory and multiple dimensions of identity theory. From an adult-transition theory lens of *moving into* higher education, Schlossberg, Lynch, and Chickering (1989) suggested that some search for a new identity through education.

In their analysis, Schlossberg, Lynch, and Chickering (1989) discussed situations where people in transition feel their former identity no longer fits. In my study, the data indicate that in a veteran's transition to college, the new identity does not fit. As one

research participant stated, “We’re living our life in reverse.” In the next section, I will analyze research participant data that indicate research participants would like to transfer aspects of their military identity into the higher education culture.

The research participant data indicated veterans bring a set of performance, responsibility and accountability expectations from the military into the higher education environment. Most research participants indicated they were accustomed to performance evaluations and/or feedback in the military that allowed them to make necessary job adjustments. Most also indicated they expected good feedback mechanisms in the academic environment. In that context, one particular research participant indicated grades alone are not sufficient for student veterans to obtain the type of academic feedback they wish to receive.

The student veteran expectation of interactive feedback between students and faculty is certainly not a new concept. Chickering and Gamson (1987) presented seven principles that could be implemented to improve undergraduate education. Chickering and Gamson (1987, p. 2) stated that good practice in undergraduate education:

1. Encourages contacts between students and faculty
2. Develops reciprocity and cooperation among students
3. Uses active learning techniques
4. Gives prompt feedback
5. Emphasizes time on task
6. Communicates high expectations
7. Respects diverse talents and ways of learning

Student veterans have these expectations at heart despite the fact they are often not realized. In a similar context, Yorke (2003) touted the importance of formative assessment in student higher education learning. He suggested that the essence of formative assessment is to subsidize student learning through a formal or informal performance feedback process. The student veteran's feedback expectations align with the research findings of both Chickering and Gamson (1987) and Yorke (2003). The student veterans' expectation of interactive feedback between students and faculty also aligns with the Sargent and Schlossberg (1988) adult-transition 4-S approach, particularly wherein student veterans analyze their academic *situation*, look for academic *support*, and have an expectation for the development of a *strategy*. I also point out an alignment with MDIT whereby the military identity expects feedback to exist in the domain of a student veteran identity.

The analysis of the data on identity transformation and development does not indicate that student veterans choose to construct or develop a student identity. That perspective emerged from the aforementioned data analysis whereby student veterans point to major differences between themselves and traditional-aged students. The research participants' pursuit of higher education suggests that college is important to them. However, the data also suggest student veterans pursue higher education without a commitment to a student identity. Furthermore, all research participants expressed the importance of graduating from college and moving on with their lives.

Life Purpose Expansion through Environmental Adaptation

The chapter's previous theme presented identity aspects of research participant data intended to analyze student veterans' concept of identity transformation as college students. This last theme analyzes student veteran life expansion as an environmental adaptation process. Research participants in the study indicated a desire to expand their life opportunities with a college degree. My intent is to analyze the environmental adaption process student veterans use to negotiate a college transition life expansion process.

I will use adult-transition theory to examine research data in this theme as guided by Schlossberg's (1984) contention that a transition process reflects the way an individual evaluates and reacts to an event or situation over time. Furthermore, using Schlossberg, Lynch and Chickering (1989) as an additional adult-transition theory platform, I will analyze student data to evaluate research participants' notions of life expansion in the *move into* college from the military. The data analysis will lead to the application of the Sargent and Schlossberg (1988) 4-S adult-transition model where, specifically, research participants engage the model to execute *situation* evaluation, *support* solutions, and *strategy* reactions. In addition, I will also use multiple dimensions of identity theory (MDIT) to analyze the data from a multi-dimensional identity perspective.

With the understanding individual circumstances vary, the theme will be examined with the presumption a veteran's transition to college is a process that has no clearly identifiable beginning point. Transition will be incremental and may begin before

a service member is released from active military duty. As Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson (2006) pointed out, transition can occur over time during life stages or phases. For example, an active duty service member may enroll in military release-oriented college transition classes. He or she may take online college classes to prepare for military release and subsequent college enrollment.

I also contend that for some, the veteran college transition process concludes only upon graduation. For example, student veterans who have various types of disabilities may be required to manage college transition challenges throughout their college career. Further, unless a student veteran specifically steps forward with questions, issues, needs, or challenges, college campus administrators are often unable to perceive particular needs. Therefore, a veteran's transition to college will be examined as an ongoing, continuous process that may begin while one is on active duty, and may continue to the point of graduation.

Life purpose expansion through environmental adaptation will therefore be analyzed from a student veteran involvement and institutional response perspective in a veteran's college transition process. To guide transition using a life purpose expansion perspective, environmental adaptation could be expected to receive contributions from both student veterans and an institution of higher education. Those contributions may be physical or psychological. As a psychological contributor, Cook et al. (2012) noted that values affirmation helps students in transition buffer environmental threats and reinforce a sense of belonging.

To reiterate Schlossberg's (1984) contention, a transition process reflects the way an individual evaluates and reacts to an event or situation over time. I also submit that a transition process reflects the way an institution evaluates and reacts to an event or situation over time. I will first examine research participants' transition reactions that occur over a period of time. For example, some research participants noted their transition experience began while they were active duty service members and continued after college enrollment at SFA. Some research participants indicated they participated in college transition seminars while they were in the military. While on active duty, another research participant enrolled as an online student at SFA to prepare for subsequent campus enrollment after his release from the military. Some research participants noted their transition experiences continued after enrollment on campus as they addressed PTSD, interacted with younger students, navigated an unfamiliar academic environment, and managed other concerns.

As noted by Koepke and Denissen (2012) individuals construct self-meaning through daily interactions with their immediate environment, which results in the development of identity as a self-organizing system. Another environmental consideration in the context of this study is an institution's reaction during transition processes. In that context, SFA examined the need to develop and support a veterans' resource center. Research participants discussed that process. As noted in an earlier chapter, the idea to develop a VRC was conceived, evaluated, and subsequently promoted by student veterans. In fact, a major student veteran advocacy campaign took

place to develop a VRC. Through that extended process, the institution understood the importance of a VRC to support student veterans and established the center.

As noted, environmental adaptation includes different considerations. To advance the examination, the data analysis continues with environmental adaptation sub-themes that begin with an examination of environmental threats. The three sub-themes that will be presented are: student veterans' examination of environmental threats; student veterans' adoption of a mission-based approach to college; and significance of the VRC to student veterans. The first sub-theme that follows analyzes research participants concerns about the higher educational environment that influences their college transition experience and impacts the development of their lives.

Student Veterans Examine Environmental Threats

As a college transition concern most research participants discussed their perception of threats in a higher education environment. For some student veterans, the threats were physical in nature, and related to their combat experiences. For most, the threats appeared to be psychological and pertained to the uncertainty of a new environment. The identified threats suggested they impacted student veteran success. For example, many research participants expressed uncertainty about interaction between student veterans and faculty. Some considered faculty members to be unapproachable. Some student veterans characterized the college environment as being abstract. Another psychological threat that emerged from research participants was the concern about

academic readiness. Combat veterans expressed concerns about crowded classrooms and their inability to focus and concentrate.

Findings from Ackerman, DiRamio, and Mitchel (2009) supported some of the threat concerns research participants in this study mentioned. That study noted that some participants had focus and concentration issues, and did not like large crowds. Another psychological threat research participants in this study discussed was the absence of structure in a higher education environment. Many expressed feelings of being overwhelmed in an open, malleable environment that did not provide the specific direction and routine they were accustomed to in the military. Livingston, Havice, Cawthon, and Fleming (2011) noted that student veterans found it difficult to transition from a rigid military structure to a loose higher education structure. Findings from this study's participants also suggested an unstructured higher educational environment presented a social threat to student veterans. Research (Livingston and Baumann, 2013) observed similar organizational transition challenges for student veterans.

Student veteran threat management. Research participants in this study recognized and expressed different types of threats they encountered in the transition from the military to college. Some were cultural and organizational conflicts. Research participants noted that as threats were identified, they examined ways to mitigate or eliminate the threats. To address the unstructured organizational threat, student veterans gathered in the VRC to reinforce their structured military bond. Student veterans indicated academic and career guidance was limited. They had formal and informal discussion sessions to discuss academic challenges. Without realizing the theoretical

application, student veterans employed portions of the Sargent and Schlossberg (1988) 4-S transition model to identity threats (evaluate *situations*), and address their concerns (develop solution *strategies*).

As a solution *strategy,* student veterans resolved their threat conflict by engaging a forum where they could find information and guidance they trusted. Student veterans evaluated the environmental differences between the military and college (*situation*), and developed a *strategy* using a *coping* mechanism to address environmental threats and concerns. The VRC was utilized to address any and all appropriate student veteran issues and concerns, including perceived environmental threats that impacted student veteran success. Through the VRC social and information network, all research participants in this study indicated they *coped* with various environmental concerns by discussing them with other student veterans. Some indicated that VRC engagement provided support to seek help and/or solve problems. Through the lens of multiple dimensions of identity theory, student veterans also engaged their military identity and created a solutions-based network with other student veterans at the VRC.

Student Veterans Adopt a Mission-based Approach to College Transition

As discussed in Chapter IV, student veterans' training and experiences have conditioned them to approach certain objectives and tasks as missions. Many research participants allowed their military identity to emerge when they spoke of approaching college as a mission. With their varied life experiences and maturity, student veterans were accustomed to various types of environmental adaptations. While they were

unwilling to relinquish their military identity, research participants adopted a mission commitment to adapt to a new higher education environment. Most research participants indicated that obtaining a college degree was a desired life expansion. As their college mission, some discussed the fact that having a college degree set a positive role example for their children.

As noted earlier, the concept of mission is a part of a student veteran's military identity. Birkler, Neu, and Kent (1998) discuss the concept of military mission as operational objectives that are further divided into specific tasks. The concept of mission is certainly not confined to military operations, however. In a technological mission planning study, Dias et al. (2006), established an objective protocol that included mission programming, mission planning, and mission tasks. Arguably, that process has similarities to the mission approach that student veterans used in their environmental adaptation process. In that mission engagement process, student veterans utilized the Sargent and Schlossberg (1988) 4-S adult-transition theory model to analyze their college transition process (*situation*), examine their strengths and experiences (*self*), evaluate necessary *support* (VRC), and engage an operational *strategy*. Most student veterans engaged a *strategy* that allowed them to manage college transition concerns within the VRC network.

Significance of the Veterans Resource Center (VRC)

The importance of the campus VRC has been mentioned numerous times in Chapters Four and Five. In the overall context of this study, the VRC serves a critical

role in the transition of veterans to college as well as in the ongoing transition process that student veterans undergo. The VRC serves specific transition needs for student veterans. It provides a place where student veterans can associate with other student veterans. A sense of belonging is established through the common military bond.

The significance of belonging was noted by Durdella and Kim (2012) who noted that a sense of belonging relates to first-year student persistence, and both academic and social factors contribute to a student's sense of belonging in college. Some research participants in my study indicated that if the VRC were not available, they would not be enrolled in college. I have mentioned the application of both adult-transition theory and multiple dimensions of identity theory in the analysis of the VRC. To recapitulate, as adults who are military veterans, the VRC provides a sense of belonging, safety, community, information, identity, and socialization. In that regard, its function can be viewed through both lenses of adult-transition theory and multiple dimensions of identity theory.

All research participants in this study acknowledged the VRC's importance to student veterans at SFA. Many of the veteran transition concerns expressed by research participants in Chapter IV addressed age and maturity differences between student veterans and traditional-aged college students. The VRC is a place where student veterans find those who are of similar age and maturity levels. Branker (2009) pointed out that social support is important to students because it offers a "safety net" when challenges take place. A very similar description of the SFA VRC was provided by a

research participant in my study who called it a "safe house." The VRC played a critical role in research participants' initial and ongoing student veteran transition process.

As noted, the importance of the SFA Veterans Resource Center resonates from this study's participants. Each emphasized the importance of the VRC in promoting a sense of belonging for student veterans on the SFA campus. As noted earlier, some participants indicated they would not have remained enrolled if the VRC had not been established and supported. As an information exchange, students discuss academic directions, academic advising, performance evaluation feedback, and counseling opportunities on campus. It also serves a vital social function. Student veterans are able to find the camaraderie they experienced in the military and miss in a college environment. Socially, the VRC connects student veterans with those who have many similar life experiences, and are similar in age. From an emotional perspective, research participants also indicated they feel a level of trust and security when they are surrounded and supported by other veterans.

Recommendations for Future Research

Information gleaned from available research and research participants' responses suggested some opportunities for additional military veteran college transition research. The first recommendation is additional research regarding female veterans' transition to college. The percentage of women in the U. S. military is significant. CNN reported that, according to Pentagon figures, women comprise slightly over 14 percent of enlisted military service members (CNN, 2013). The report also indicated that more than 16% of

military officers are women (CNN, 2013). Furthermore, the number of female service members deployed to combat zones is significant. Bumiller and Shanker (2013) reported that more than 280,000 women have served in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars.

The two female student veterans in my study indicated that as women, they have unique challenges. Both suggested family and college student responsibilities often caused internal conflict. Responsibilities for children seemed to be major concerns for both women. The women also noted that time management was often stressful. Research suggests that some female student veterans may encounter other types of college transition challenges.

One of the challenges that some female student veterans face is post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The types of experiences that trigger PTSD in male service members could also impact female service members. Baechtold and De Sawal (2009) noted that the Iraq and Afghanistan wars have exposed a large number of female service members to combat operations. As a result, female service members have engaged in firefights, have been taken prisoner, and have been killed. Baechtold and De Sawal (2009) suggested that female student veterans' college experiences could be influenced by combat-related exposure.

Another issue that could impact female student veterans is sexual assault. Baechtold and De Sawal (2009) described military sexual assault (MST) as sexual harassment or sexual assault that takes place in the military. The authors noted a study that indicated 78 percent of active duty female service members had encountered sexual harassment, and 6 percent had been raped. They also indicated that MST could lead to

depression and alcohol abuse. Thus, additional female student veteran research could examine female student veteran family responsibilities, female student veteran time management stress, and female student veteran PTSD and MST.

Another opportunity for additional college transition veteran research is a comparison of the college transition experiences between combat student veterans and service members who were not deployed in a combat zone. In this context, a combat veteran describes a service member who engaged in combat operations. In my study, combat veterans described mental transition issues that differed somewhat from those who were not deployed to a combat zone. Study participant combat veterans stated that hyper-vigilance and crowded classroom conditions impacted their ability to focus in class testing situations. Service members with no combat zone deployment emphasized other transition concerns such as maturity differences between themselves and traditional-aged college students, among others.

Ackerman, DiRamio, and Mitchell (2009) corroborated the concerns that combat veteran research participants in my study expressed. The authors' combat veteran study participants also noted focus and concentration issues, heightened vigilance, and aversion to crowds as being college transition challenges. In my study, combat support student veterans did not cite heightened vigilance, concentration issues or crowd aversion as college transition concerns. However, both combat and non-combat student veterans in my study described age differences between traditional-aged college students and themselves as a common transition concern. Although there were common student veteran transition issues, the influence of combat experiences suggested differences

between a combat and a non-combatant's college transition. Therefore, additional student veteran transition research could examine profile differences between combat and non-combat student veterans and transition coping strategy differences between combat and non-combat student veterans.

Chapter I presented the research questions that guided this study. The first question considered the various types of transition issues that impact military veterans' transition to college. As analysed in Chapter IV, those transition issues included age differences between student veterans and traditional-aged college students, maturity differences between the two groups, and life experience differences, among others. Another question that was central to the study was the concern about student veterans' sense of belonging on a college campus. The data, data analysis, and findings emphasized the role of the Veterans Resource Center as the repository of helpful student veteran information, the social hub for student veterans, and the "safe place" where student veterans could manage stress and find a trusting environment. The third question addressed student success opportunities for student veterans. The data and findings indicate that student veterans need to be engaged socially and academically. As research participants noted, quality and timely feedback about academic and career decisions can strengthen their college persistence and success. Lastly, student veterans and traditional-aged students' transition issues differ with respect to age differences, life experiences, and adult responsibilities.

Conclusion

This study was an examination of the transition of military veterans to college. The study was conducted on the Stephen F. Austin State University campus, and data were collected from research participants who had served on active duty in the United States Air Force, Army, Army Reserves, Marines, National Guard, and Navy. Twelve personal interviews were conducted and research participants included eight white males, two African-American males, and two white females. The participants' ages ranged from twenty-three to forty years old. Most received some level of educational support from the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill.

College transition concerns expressed by research participants included age differences between student veterans and traditional eighteen to twenty-four year old college students, maturity differences between the two populations, differences in life experiences, managing adult responsibilities in a higher educational environment, moving from a structured military environment to an unstructured higher education environment, and obtaining a sense of purpose in a new higher educational environment.

When I began the literature review for Chapter II, I noticed common transition concerns that student veterans expressed in different research studies. When I began participant interviews, it was interesting to note the same types of transition concerns presented in other studies. The research interviews and literature reflect many common college transition themes among the current generation of student veterans. To me, that is significant, for the number of veterans who are eligible for the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill and are enrolling in college is growing dramatically.

As the study unfolded, it was also interesting to observe the relevance of the theoretical framework components of adult-transition theory and multiple dimensions of identity theory. The framework helped analyze adult military veterans and their college transition concerns. As a researcher, the discovery for me was the consistency of emergent data. Some information the research participants shared were consistent with my student veteran transition to college. I was also pleased to observe the patriotism and concern for our country's defense this generation of veterans expressed. The data obtained and analyzed in this chapter provided an opportunity to develop some recommendations for practice that are presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER VI

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Introduction

In Chapter V, I analyzed student veteran college transition challenges. Many study findings aligned with adult-transition theory. Regardless of experiential background, many adults who return to college have similar transition concerns. As with any particular population however, veterans have unique needs. With respect to college transition, student veterans' adult and life experiences separate them from the traditional-aged student body. As adults, most are responsible for life and career decisions. Consequently, many student veterans are concerned about college uncertainty and need information to make sound academic and career decisions. The recommendations in this chapter emerged from this study's research participant concerns about veteran college transition.

Obtaining information was noted as an important transition consideration for student veterans. Service members or veterans who consider enrolling in college after the military would benefit from comprehensive enrollment and institutional information maintained on a student veteran services web site. Ideally, the information would be available on a student veteran organization (SVO) or veterans' resource center (VRC) web site, a "one stop information shop" that provides information about admission requirements, financial aid, counseling, academic advising, disability services, veterans'

services, and student life opportunities as well as detailed information and links to other departments.

A campus VRC or SVO web site can serve as a university internet information hub that benefits potential veteran students. Many veteran services web sites offer "you must provide" information, but not all provide "what to do or how to" information. Military service members understand "you must" information, but they also want "what to do" and "how to do" information. A VRC or SVO should offer the "what to do" and "how to" on its web site. The following information is suggested for inclusion on an SVO or VRC web site.

A VRC or SVO web site could contain a section entitled, "Information for Current Military Service Members." A second section could be entitled, "Information for Current Student Veterans." Some types of information would be applicable for all institutions while other information could be institution-specific. A pro forma template is included in Appendix D. As presented in Appendix D, the first recommendation for veterans interested in enrolling in higher education, is the development of a college transition plan. The points or steps included in the template are examples and should not be considered exhaustive or complete. The importance of a college transition plan is discussed next.

College Transition Plan

As indicated in earlier chapters, there are financial responsibilities that accompany a veteran's transition to college. As service members, many student

veterans' living expenses had been provided by the military. In the transition to college, student veterans must make decisions about food, housing, health care, and insurance. In addition to changes in basic living expense support, student veterans who have children must make choices about family insurance coverage, childcare and health care arrangements. Many veterans who enter college are first-generation college students and need assistance with their transition into higher education. Whether veterans are first-generation college students or not, many are unsure about academic preparedness, career opportunities and specific college choices.

Regardless of individual circumstances, all veterans who transition from the military to college would benefit greatly by developing a college transition plan. Ideally, a service member should develop a college transition plan while he or she is on active duty. Active duty service members or veterans could be guided in the development of a college transition plan from an institution's SVO or VRC web site. Therefore, the plan should include transition logistics and contingency considerations. Some of those may include the proximity of the active duty release base to the selected higher education institution, housing, child care facilities, part-time jobs if needed, and other considerations. As noted, Appendix D provides a pro forma college transition template.

Service Member Participation

If their duty assignment permits, military service members who wish to enter college when they are released from active duty should gather information and contact their chosen college well in advance of their military release date. Additionally, service

members who plan to attend college when they are released from active duty should attend military-to-civilian college transition seminars conducted by the military. Furthermore, during the last year of their duty assignment, service members should reevaluate their career interests, abilities, and experience as they begin to formulate their college transition plan.

The military has extensive resource material about jobs and careers. Beginning the final year of their contract period, service members should collect information from military resources about specific career interests. For those who are unsure about how their interests relate to career options, aptitude testing and other interest evaluation tests are available. Service members who wish to attend college should utilize every possible resource that the military offers to obtain career interest and college information. From the information obtained about one's career interest, a service member or veteran can develop a higher education academic direction.

Academic Preparation

Some research participants expressed concerns they were not prepared academically when they entered college after military service. The point was often made they had been out of high school for a typical minimum period of three years, and in many cases, much longer. Many service members or veterans may not be aware of their level of academic preparedness until they enter college. Moreover, some may be unaware of co-curricular proficiency requirements. In some cases, a veteran's first full-

time college enrollment is a senior institution, wherein certain levels of academic preparedness are expected.

If service members have concerns about academic preparedness, they should investigate military resources that provide academic assessment. If testing suggests academic remediation, a community college might be the appropriate first college choice. However, if a service member chooses to begin his or her education at a community college, he or she should plan for enrollment at an appropriate senior college after the community college work or a degree is completed. Furthermore, service members should consider higher education institutions that align with college preparedness and career interests.

Benefits of a College Transition Plan

A well-developed college transition plan will include components that are unique to an individual veteran. Depending on one's military assignment and circumstances, the plan should include steps that begin on active duty and continue through college enrollment. As research participants indicated in Chapter IV, uncertainty about college and the necessary information needed to make good decisions are important for veterans in the transition process to college. A well-developed plan may serve as a guide to obtain information and reduce college transition uncertainty.

Veterans or military personnel seeking admission-related information would also benefit from a college-transition checklist posted on an SVO or VRC web site. Service members on active duty could utilize the check list to confirm or gather additional

information from military resources. The institutional web site's check list should include a campus contact for specific questions or additional information. An example of a college transition checklist is provided in Appendix E. Again, the checklist is not to be considered exhaustive or complete. The next recommendation for veterans in transition to college is participation in a new student veteran orientation.

New Student Veteran Orientation

Many college campuses have strong student involvement programs that focus on first-time or traditional-aged students. Some have "freshman camp" events wherein new students are exposed to student life and campus engagement opportunities. In addition to traditional student emphasis, campus cultural assimilation should be expanded to include student veterans. Student veterans' age, maturity, and experiences limit their interests in a traditional student campus acclimation process. Therefore, an option to support veterans' transition needs should begin with a separate student veteran orientation program.

As adults, most student veterans do not wish to engage in traditional-aged student social events that hold little substantive value for their particular needs. However, as formerly discussed, one of the primary concerns student veterans have is obtaining information for decision-making. A new student veteran orientation should include staff members who can provide information about veterans' benefits, veterans' counseling, financial aid, academic advising, disability services, counseling, campus health services, and student life engagement opportunities. If a campus VRC or SVO is established, the

institution should provide student veterans with information about its supporting role on campus. During or shortly following the student veteran orientation, a student veteran should be guided to develop an academic plan. This suggested plan can serve as a guide preceding the formal "degree plan" many higher education institutions require.

Academic Plan

After college enrollment, a student veteran should actively work with his or her academic advisor to develop an academic plan and ensure the intended academic direction is appropriate. That particular advisor may be at an institutional or department level. During advising, a re-examination of previous assessment testing, academic interests, or necessary remediation should be discussed. If academic advising occurs outside of one's major department, a student veteran should be encouraged to develop a relationship(s) with a faculty member in his major department. It is important to note that transition continues as a student veteran reassesses his or her *situation*, *self*, *support* and *strategy* process (Sargent and Schlossberg, 1988).

Campus Community Engagement

In Chapters IV and V, I maintained that student veteran transition does not end upon enrollment. For individual student veterans with specific transition needs, the process may continue until graduation. One way to address continuing transition concerns is through student veteran engagement. Military service members are a closely-knit community. Student veterans indicated what they miss most about the military is the

camaraderie and support of fellow service members. That is certainly logical, for at the onset of a recruit's training, he or she is taught to support and rely on his or her military comrades. Furthermore, continued training, culture, traditions, and teamwork reinforce camaraderie. A level of trust develops that provides both physical and emotional insulation. When veterans leave those relationships, they miss military camaraderie.

In an adult-transition context, Goodman, Schlossberg, and Anderson (2006) explained that adults in transition must work through a change process that may include a sense of loss and confusion. To manage that change and loss, student veterans should be encouraged to actively seek social relationships on the college campus. Ideally, student veterans should engage in various campus activities which may include social interest groups, mentoring or volunteering. Regardless, it is important for student veterans to develop a sense of camaraderie that may help promote a sense of belonging on campus. Moreover, institutional intervention may be needed to guide that relationship-building process.

Engagement with Faculty and Administrators

In addition to the development of social relationships, student veterans should be encouraged to actively pursue the development of professional relationships with faculty and administrators. A tremendous benefit of the college experience is the result of professional relationships that can develop between students, faculty, and administrators. While student veterans are in college, campus professionals can serve as mentors and provide professional references after graduation. Chickering and Gamson (1987)

contended that interaction with faculty and staff was the first of seven principles of good practice in undergraduate education.

In an earlier section I recommended that veterans develop a college transition plan. I also suggested that student veterans and academic advisors work together to develop an academic plan. From a proactive institutional engagement perspective, faculty and administrators should not presume that as adults, student veterans do not need or desire guidance. Often, veterans are reluctant to express needs or ask for help because they do not want to appear weak or uninformed. To the extent possible, information should be available that both encourages and promotes institutional interaction with student veterans.

Faculty and Staff Mentors

As suggested, institutions should actively promote interaction between student veterans and faculty and staff. However, student veterans are often reluctant to pursue an advising or mentoring relationship with faculty and staff because they view them as "the brass." Military culture and structure create boundaries between enlisted service members and officers. Initially, some student veterans feel structural boundaries exist in higher education culture between students and faculty. Institutions should encourage faculty and staff to serve as mentors and guides for student veterans. The VRC or SVO should ask faculty and staff who are veterans to serve as mentors for student veterans. Furthermore, the VRC could act in a liaison capacity and match willing campus employees with student veterans who would like to have campus mentors. As previously

mentioned, student veteran relationship-building can offer student veteran benefits that extend well beyond graduation. As part of the student veteran/faculty relationship, an opportunity exists to mitigate student veteran academic uncertainty.

Demystify the College Experience

As pointed out in research participant interviews, many student veterans are first-generation college students. Consequently, they have little or no perspective about college life. The process to demystify college for a veteran should begin when a veteran seeks admission and enrollment information from an institution. When a veteran contacts an institution for information, staff members should assist with any information needs, and provide web site support information. Most college applications request veteran status. Therefore, as an admission application is processed, the institution should provide academic and financial aid information, counseling, and a campus overview for each veteran applicant. To also address student veteran transition concerns, an institution should implement a guidance process that addresses current transition within the context of a student veteran's life expansion.

Develop a Life Expansion Plan

I will again turn to adult-transition theory to examine an ongoing student veteran transition process. Schlossberg, Lynch, and Chickering (1989) offered a transition perspective of those who returned to higher education as adults. The authors described the process as occurring in three phases; *moving into* the higher education learning

environment, *moving through* that environment, and *moving on*. One of the major findings in Chapter IV and discussed earlier in this chapter, was the student veteran struggle with uncertainty. As adults, students need information as they *move into* college, *move through* college, and *move on*. Therefore, the analysis and recommendations will view a veteran's transition process as *moving into* and *through* higher education, as well as *moving on* after graduation.

To view veteran and student veteran transition as a continuous process extending until graduation and influencing life expansion, one must reiterate student veteran transition may persist throughout college. Additionally, life expansion reinforces the importance of establishing a long-term perspective that makes current and intermediate term environmental adaptation meaningful. The next section offers institutional recommendations to help student veterans manage current transition concerns by focusing on long-term strategies. Many of those strategies center around a campus Veterans Resource Center (VRC).

Role of the Veterans Resource Center

The importance of a campus VRC has been mentioned numerous times in Chapters Four and Five. In the overall context of this study, the VRC serves a critical role in the transition of veterans to college as well as the ongoing transition process that student veterans undergo. The VRC serves specific transition needs for student veterans. It provides a place where student veterans can associate with other student veterans. A sense of belonging can be promoted through the common military bond. Many of the

veteran transition concerns expressed by research participants in Chapter IV addressed age and maturity differences between student veterans and traditional-aged college students. The VRC is a place where student veterans find those who are of similar age and maturity levels. The VRC can play a critical role in the ongoing student veteran transition process and may also serve a catalytic role in student veterans' adaptation to and modification of the college campus environment by creating engagement among the student veterans.

Build Campus Relationships

In an earlier section I recommended that student veterans should become actively engaged on campus. Such engagement is important. However, sometimes student veterans are at a loss as to where they should begin. I suggest the veterans' services and/or the campus veterans resource center (VRC) develop programs and initiate action that targets and assists student veterans and identifies potential campus engagement opportunities. A number of student veteran transition concerns can be addressed in that effort.

First, campus engagement opportunities can help create a sense of purpose for student veterans. As this study's research participants strongly indicated, veterans are motivated by service. That is part of their military identity. One engagement option could be to serve as mentors or sponsors for traditional-aged students. Student veterans' life experiences and maturity could be channeled into mentoring opportunities. It is important to note the institution's role in setting up this type of engagement opportunity

and providing that information to student veterans. The VRC or SVO can serve as that information distribution point.

Secondly, campus engagement can foster a sense of community and belonging for student veterans. The role of the VRC has been discussed as a place where student veterans can feel they belong on campus. However, an institution should encourage student veteran campus engagement that extends beyond the camaraderie that student veterans find in the VRC. As student veterans establish a sense of belonging through engagement, it is likely they will build relationships that contribute to their life expansion. Moreover, they may minimize the age and maturity differences between themselves and the traditional-aged student population. Furthermore, the VRC can strengthen a student veteran connection with the broader campus community through electronic campus newsletters.

Information

As formerly noted, a campus VRC also serves as an essential information hub. Veterans who are interested in attending college often contact a campus VRC directly for college and admission information. VRC staff members or "regulars" provide guidance for many veterans who are in the beginning stages of the *moving into* higher education transition phase presented by Schlossberg, Lynch, and Chickering (1989). This is a very important role, for the VRC can assist a veteran who is in a college transition process as well as serve as a recruiter for the institution. In an earlier section I discussed the need for veterans to develop a college plan. In the beginning stages of

application and admission, the VRC can work with a veteran to develop a college transition plan and help develop a transition checklist. VRC staff members can also direct veterans who are interested in attending the institution to other campus departments such as admissions, veterans counseling and financial aid, among others.

Another vital information role the VRC plays for its current student veterans is in the *moving through* higher education transition stage. Student veterans often turn to the VRC for specific campus questions. One of the critical functions of a campus VRC is to direct student veterans to campus departments where academic or student life issues can be addressed. This is a crucial service role for the VRC because a continuing awareness of transition concerns can reveal and address student veteran challenges that stymie student veteran success.

Trust

Another critical role a campus VRC serves is to offer an atmosphere of trust in a higher educational environment. As noted earlier, student veterans come from a military background where trust and interdependence is essential for mission success and survival. As an environment where student veterans' perception of trust exists, the VRC can offer guidance for student veterans to help build confidence in other areas of campus life. As Summerlot, Green, and Parker (2009) suggested, a veterans' service organization offers student veterans a place to interact with peers where colleagues speak the same language. As noted in chapters four and five, one of my study's research participants called the SFA VRC a "safe house." Student veteran campus trust can also contribute to

relationship building and confidence for student veterans to become more involved in broader campus activities. The VRC can encourage various speakers throughout campus to hold information sessions at the VRC.

Conclusion

As I mentioned in Chapter I, over two million veterans have served in the United States military since September 11, 2001 (McBain et al., 2012). As also pointed out, the Post-9/11 G. I. Bill (PGIB) was passed by the United States Congress and signed into law on June 30, 2008, by President George W. Bush. The PGIB was implemented on August 1, 2009 (United States Department of Veterans Affairs, 2009). Military service members who served after September 10, 2001 are eligible for the PGIB. The number of military veterans eligible for the PGIB represents a significant potential higher education population. Griffin and Gilbert (2015) indicated that over 600,000 veterans have enrolled in higher education since the PGIB was enacted on August 1, 2009. Institutions of higher education have a responsibility and opportunity to address enrollment needs and concerns of a growing veteran population.

The recommendations in this chapter emerged from interviews with this study's research participants and observations in my higher education administrative career. Some research participants in this study had either graduated from SFA or were close to graduation. With the benefit of experiential hindsight, they offered suggestions that could improve the veteran and student veteran transition to college. The recommendations I presented are not unique for higher education institutional

operations. It is likely that many or most institutions have organizational processes that serve students in ways similar to those I suggested. However, my research indicates that an institution may not be fully aware of a student veteran population's particular academic and social needs.

The higher education benefit to military veterans is obvious. They have a generous level of PGIB financial support that provides an opportunity to attend college. Higher education institutions have an opportunity to develop academic and social support for a group of mature former service members who indicate they are serious college students. In my higher education institutional experience, we are often best served by listening to our students and stakeholders. Institutionally speaking, we now have an opportunity to serve those who have served us. When the quiet ones speak, we should listen.

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APPENDIX A

Interview Questions

The research questions that were posed to student veteran research participants to address the problem statement are as follows:

1. Describe the process whereby you moved from a military to a college environment
2. Describe the challenges you encountered in the transition process from military service to college enrollment
3. Describe the various challenges you encountered when you became a college student
4. Describe your sense of purpose or belonging as a college student
5. Describe the difference you perceive between a traditional college student and a student veteran
6. Discuss the needs of a college-student veteran
7. Discuss the college support services that would help veterans obtain a sense of belonging in a higher education environment

APPENDIX B

Table B-1. Navigation of realigned adult responsibilities

Sub-theme	Data Category
Negotiating life management issues	Age differences Maturity Life experiences Military experiences
Stress	Adult responsibilities Academic preparedness
Development of an information, communication network, and support system	Information uncertainty and information feedback

Table B-2. Identity transformation and development

Sub-theme	Data Category
Identity transformation and development	Identity formation Military identity formation and its influence The addition of identity layers The development of a student veteran identity Student veterans resist the release of their military identity

Table B-3. Life purpose expansion through environmental adaptation

Sub-theme	Data Category	Data Sub-category
Student veterans examine environmental threats	Environmental reconciliation	Structure
		Culture
		PTSD
Environmental adaptation	Threat analysis	
Student veterans adopt a mission-based approach to college transition	Sense of purpose	Mission
		Adaptability
		Service
Significance of the Veterans Resource Center		Sense of belonging

APPENDIX C

Table C-1. Research themes and sub-themes

Themes	Sub-themes
Navigation of realigned adult responsibilities	Negotiating life management issues Development of an information, communication network, and support system
Identity transformation and development	The formation of military identity and its influence on student veterans The addition of identity layers The development of a student veteran identity
Life purpose expansion through environmental adaptation	Student veterans examine environmental threats Student veterans adopt a mission-based approach to college transition Significance of the Veterans Resource Center

APPENDIX D

Information That Should Be Listed on a University's Veteran Services Web Site

Information for Current Military Service Members

1. Develop a college transition plan
    a. Attend college transition seminars offered on your military base or on-line
    b. Ensure you have extra copies of your DD Form 214 (Military Release Form); four copies showing release from activity duty or discharge status
    c. Investigate academic preparedness testing opportunities on your military base
    d. Obtain civilian career guidance information from your base's educational services
    e. Utilize career, interest, and aptitude educational testing services on your base
    f. Determine your level of G.I. Bill eligibility while you are on active duty
    g. Determine tuition and fee costs at the college or university you are interested in
    h. Obtain living expense estimates in the college or university's region you are interested in
    i. Obtain housing information from the college, university or city chamber of commerce

j. Obtain information about child care in the university region you are interested in
k. Contact the college or university's human resources department for on-campus job information and opportunities
l. Contact career services for career-related information
m. Obtain information about new student veteran orientations
n. Admissions contact information
o. Financial Aid contact information
p. Disability Services contact information
q. Academic Advising contact information
r. Registrar's Office for transcript or college transfer information
s. Admissions office for transfer for transfer information and evaluation of military credits

2. Post a college transition check list (Presented in Appendix E)
3. To apply at the university or college, you must provide the following:
    a. The institution should post an admissions check list
    b. DD Form 214 (for veterans' benefits processing) and Joint Services Transcript (JST) military transcript

New Student Veteran Orientation

1. Provide the type of academic, student life, and social information that is offered to new freshmen or transfer students that is designed for veterans

2. Begin relationship building through the orientation
3. Provide an online orientation for those unable to attend a face-to-face new student veteran orientation. Include frequently asked questions (FAQ) and provide an explanation of higher education terminology

Information for Current Student Veterans

1. Develop an academic plan
    a. University or college career service
    b. Academic advisors
2. Information and updates from veterans' services
3. University calendar dates and deadlines; business office drop dates, financial aid deadlines, early registration and add/drop dates, first class day, last day of final exams, and student holidays
4. Veterans' programs and events
5. University programs and events
6. Opportunities for service and volunteerism
7. Academic Advising Services
8. Academic Tutoring and Mentoring
9. Counseling Services
10. Disability Services
11. Registrar's Office; registration help desk and registration services, verification of enrollment, etc.

APPENDIX E

State University
U. S. Military Service Member or Veteran
College Transition Checklist

1. Contact the Veterans Administration (VA) to determine your eligibility for the Post-9/11 G. I. Bill and/or the Montgomery G. I. Bill. Apply using Von-app on the G. I. Bill website www.gibill.va.gov.

2. Do you have a high school degree?
    a. If yes, you will need to provide those transcripts to admissions; skip question 3
    b. If no, proceed to question 3

3. Do you have a GED certificate?
    a. If yes, you must provide a copy of that certificate to admissions
    b. If no, contact the admissions department

4. Have you taken any college classes?
    a. If yes, you will need to have an official transcript sent from all colleges you have been enrolled in
    b. Provide an official military transcript; now called a Joint Services Transcript (JST)

5. Have you completed a FAFSA (Financial Aid Application) to apply for federal financial aid such as the Pell Grant? The Pell Grant is an example of financial aid that is separate from the Post-9/11 or Montgomery G. I. Bill

6. To apply to State University, please complete and submit the following:
    a. Application for admission and application fee by the deadline (if applicable)
    b. Provide all official college transcripts and/or official high school transcripts
    c. DD Form 214 (member 4 copy) and military transcript
    d. Any required immunization records

7. Here are a list of departments and contact information you might find useful
    a. State University Veterans Resource Center (VRC), Telephone Number, Web site
    b. State University VA School Certifying Official, Telephone Number, email address, Web site

c. State University Veterans Counselor, Telephone Number, Web site
d. State University Admissions, Telephone Number, Web site
e. State University Financial Aid, Telephone Number, Web site
f. State University Disability Services, Telephone Number, Web site
g. State University Counseling, Telephone Number, Web site
h. State University Student Life, Telephone Number, Web site